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THE LONG TRICK

BY "BARTIMEUS"

THE LONG TRICK

BY

"BARTIMEUS"

AUTHOR OF

A TALL SHIP, NAVAL OCCASIONS, ETC.

"Much of what you have done, so far as the public eye is concerned, may almost be said to have been done in the twilight."—
EXTRACT FROM ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON BOARD THE FLEET FLAGSHIP, AUGUST, 1915.

NEW YORK
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828
R492.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ONE

CHUNKS

WHO, IN MOMENTS OF FRENZY, IS CALLED

HUNKS

AND ANSWERS READILY TO

TUNKS, TINKS or TONKS

THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED

FOREWORD

DEAR N AND M,

This is the first opportunity I have had of answering your letter, although I am hardly to blame since you chose to write anonymously and leave me with no better clue to your address than the Tunbridge Wells postmark.

Fee! Fi! Fo! Fum! I am sorry about Torps, though. I admit his death was a mistake, and I fancy my Publisher thought so too: but we cannot very well bring him to life again, like Sherlock Holmes. So please cheer up, and remember that there are just as many fine fellows in the ink-pot as ever came out of it.

I have borne in mind the final paragraph of your letter, which said, "We do beseech you not to kill the India-rubber Man." In fact, I originally meant him to be the hero of this book. But as the book progressed I found the melancholy conviction growing on me that the India-rubber Man had become

infernally dull. A pair of cynical bachelors like you will, I know, attribute this to marriage and poor Betty. For my part I am inclined to put it down to advancing years.

I have just finished the book, and, turning over the pages, found myself wondering how you will like it. It has been written in so many different moods and places and noises and temperatures that the general effect is rather patchwork. But, after all, it was written chiefly for the amusement of two people, and (as I believe all story-books ought to be written) out of some curiosity on the Author's part to know "what happened next."

Thus, you see, I strive to disarm all critics at the outset by the assumption of an ingenuous indifference to anything they can say. But there is one portion of the book on which I have expended so much thought and care that I am willing to defy criticism on the subject. I refer to the Dedication.

You probably skip Dedications, but they interest me, and I have studied them a good deal. They are generally arranged in columns like untidy addition sums, and no two lines are the same length. This is very important. At the end you arrive, as

it were by a series of stepping-stones, at the climax. And there you are.

No. Let the critics say what they will about the book: but I hold that the Dedication is It.

Yours sincerely,

"Bartimeus."

OCTOBER, 1917.

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NOTE

The Chapters headed "Wet Bobs" and "Carrying On" appeared originally in *Blackwood's Magazine* and are included in the book by kind permission of the Editor.

THE LONG TRICK

THE LONG TRICK

CHAPTER I

BACK FROM THE LAND

TOWARDS eight o'clock the fog that had hung threateningly over the City all the afternoon descended like a pall.

It was a mild evening in February, and inside the huge echoing vault of King's Cross station the shaded arc lamps threw little pools of light along the departure platform where the Highland Express stood. The blinds of the carriage windows were already drawn, but here and there a circle of subdued light strayed out and was engulfed almost at once by the murky darkness. Sounds out of the unseen reached the ear muffled and confused: a motor horn hooted near the entrance, and quite close at hand a horse's hoofs clattered and rang on the cobbled paving-stones. The persistent hiss of escaping steam at the far end of the station seemed to fill the air until it was presently drowned by the ear-piercing screech of an engine: high up in the darkness ahead one of a bright cluster of red lights

holding their own against the fog, changed to green. The whistle stopped abruptly, and the voice of a boy, passing along the crowded platform, claimed all Sound for its own.

"Chor-or-or-clicks!" he cried in a not unmusical jodelling treble, *"Chorclicks!—Cigarettes!"*

The platform was thronged by bluejackets and marines, for on this particular evening the period of leave, granted by some battleship in the North, had expired. They streamed out of refreshment rooms and entrance halls, their faces lit for a moment as they passed under successive arc lights, crowding round the carriage doors where their friends and relations gathered in leave-taking. Most of them carried little bundles tied up in black silk handkerchiefs and paper parcels whose elusive contents usually appeared to take a leguminous form, and something of the traditional romance of their calling came with them out of the blackness of that February night. It was reflected in the upturned admiring faces of their women-folk, and acknowledged by some of the younger men themselves, with the adoption of an air of studied recklessness.

Some wore the head-gear of enraptured civilian acquaintances and sang in undertones of unrequited love. Others stopped in one of the friendly circles of light to pass round bottled beer, until an elderly female, bearing tracts, scattered them into the shadows. They left her standing, slightly bewildered, with the empty bottle in her hands. She had the

air, for all the world, of a member of the audience suddenly abandoned on a conjurer's stage.

In the shelter of one of the great pillars that rose up into the darkness a bearded light o' love stopped and emptied his pockets of their silver and coppers into the hands of the human derelict that had been his companion through the past week. "'Ere you are, Sally," he said, "take what's left. You ain't 'arf been a bad ole sort, mate," and kissed her and turned away as she slipped back into the night where she belonged.

Farther along in the crowd an Ordinary Seaman, tall and debonair and sleek of hair, bade osculatory farewell to a mother, an aunt, a fiancée and two sisters.

"'Ere," finally interrupted his chum, "'ere, Alf, where do I come in?"

"You carry on an' kiss Auntie," replied his friend, and applied himself to his fiancée's pretty upturned mouth. This the chum promptly did, following up the coup, amid hysterical laughter and face-slapping, by swiftly embracing the mother and sisters.

"You sailors!" said the friend's mother delightedly, straightening her hat.

"Don Jewans, all of 'em," confirmed the aunt, recovering the power of speech of which a temporary displacement of false teeth had robbed her. "Glad there wasn't no sailors down our way when *I* was a girl, or I shouldn't be 'ere now." A sally greeted by renewed merriment.

Indifferent to the laughter and horse-play near them a grave-faced Petty Officer stood by the door of his carriage saying good-bye to his wife and children before returning to another nine months' exile. A little boy in a sailor-suit clung to the woman's skirt and gazed admiringly into the face of the man he had been taught to call "Daddie"—the jovial visitor who came to stay with them for a week once a year or so, after whose departure his mother always cried so bitterly, writer of the letters she pressed against her cheek and locked away in the yellow tin box under the bed. . . .

She held another child in her arms—a wide-eyed mite that stared up into the murk overhead with preternatural solemnity. Their talk, of an inarticulate simplicity, is no concern of ours. The little group has been recorded because of the woman. Mechanically rocking the child in her arms, with her neat clothes and brave little bits of finery, with, above all, her anxious, pathetic smile as she looked up into the face of her man, she stood there for a symbol of all that the warring Navy demands of its women-folk.

Beyond them, where the first-class carriages and sleeping saloons began, the platform became quieter and less crowded. Several Naval and one or two Military officers walked to and fro, or stood at the doors of their compartments superintending the stowage of their luggage; a little way back from the light thrown from the carriage windows, two figures, a man and a girl, stood talking in low voices.

Presently the man stepped under one of the overhanging lamps and consulted his wrist-watch. The light of the arc-lamp, falling on the shoulder-straps of his uniform great-coat, indicated his rank, which was that of Lieutenant-Commander.

"We've got five minutes more," he said.

The girl nodded.

"I know. I've been ticking off the minutes for the last week—in my head, I mean." She smiled, a rather wan little smile. Her companion slipped his arm inside hers, and together they walked towards the train.

"Come and look at my cabin, Betty, and—let's see everything's there."

He helped her into the corridor, and, following, encountered the uniformed attendant. The man held a notebook in his hand.

"Are you Mr. Standish, sir?" he inquired, consulting his notebook.

"That's my name as a rule," was the reply. "At the moment though, it's Mud—spelt M-U-D. Which is my abode?"

"This way, sir." The attendant led the way along the corridor and pushed open the door of the narrow sleeping compartment. "Here you are, sir." He eyed the officer's companion with a professionally reassuring air, as much as to say, "He'll be all right in there, don't you worry." It certainly looked very snug and comfortable with the shaded light above the neat bunk and dark upholstery.

"Ah," said the traveller, "we just wanted to—er —see everything was all right."

"Quite so, sir. Plenty of time—lady not travelling, I presume? I'll come along when we're due to start and let you know." He closed the door with unobtrusive tact.

The lady in question surveyed the apartment with the tender scrutiny of a mother about to relinquish her offspring to the rough usage of an unfamiliar world.

"Bunje, darling," she said, and bent and brushed the pillow with her lips. "That's so that you'll sleep tight and not let the bogies bite." She smiled into her husband's eyes rather tremulously. "And take care of yourself as hard as ever you can. Remember your leg and your poor old head." His cap lay on the bunk, and she raised a slender forefinger to trace the outline of the shiny scar above his temple. "I've mended you so nicely."

"I'll take care of myself all right, and you won't cry, will you, Betty, when I've gone? Promise—say: 'Sure-as-I'm-standing-here-I-won't-cry,' or I'll call the guard!"

"I—I can't promise not to cry a tiny bit," faltered Betty, "but I promise to try not to cry much. And you will write and let me know when I can come North and be near you, won't you?" A sudden thought struck her. "Bunje, will they censor your letters? How awful! And mine too? Because I don't think I could bear it if anybody but you read my letters."

"No, they won't read 'em," reassured her husband. "At least, not yours. And if mine have to be read, the fellow who reads 'em just skims through 'em and doesn't really take in anything. I've had to do it, an' I know."

"Still, I'll hate it," said Betty woefully, and started at a light tap at the door. "Passengers are taking their seats, sir," said the warning voice outside.

Doors were banging and farewells sounding down the length of the train when Betty stepped out on to the platform. A curly-headed subaltern of a Highland regiment who had been in possession of the door surrendered it, and, catching a glimpse of Betty's face, returned to his compartment thanking all his Gods that he was a bachelor. A whistle sounded out of the gloom at the far end of the long train, and a green light waved above the heads of the leave-takers. A faltering cheer broke out, gathered volume, and, as the couplings tautened with a jerk, came an answering roar from the closely packed carriages.

Standish bent down. "Good-bye, Bet——" and for a moment lips and fingers met and clung. The train was moving slowly.

"God bless you!" she said with a queer little gasp, and stepped back into one of the circles of subdued light.

For a few seconds he saw her thus, a slim, girlish, fur-clad figure standing with her hands at her side like a schoolgirl in class, her face rather white and

her lips compressed: then a bend hid her and the tumult of cheering and farewell died.

"Good on you, little girl," he muttered, and withdrew his head and shoulders to fumble fiercely for his pipe. Courage in the woman he loves will move a man as never will her tears. There is also gratitude in his heart.

He retraced his steps to his sleeping-compartment and was aware of the faint fragrance of violets still lingering in the air. She had been wearing some that he had bought her late that afternoon. . . .

He sat down on the bunk and fervently pressed the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe with his thumb. "Oh, damn-a-horse!" he said. For a moment he sat thus sucking his unlit pipe and staring hard at the carpet, and not until it sounded a second time did a knock at the door of the compartment cause him to raise his head and say, "Come in!"

The door opened, and a clean-shaven, smiling countenance, followed by a pair of broad shoulders, appeared cautiously in the opening. Standish stared at the apparition, and then rose with a grin of welcome.

"Why!" he said, "Podgie, of all people! Come in, you old blighter!"

The visitor entered. "How goes it, Bunje?" he said. "I saw you with your missus just now, so I hid—I'm in the next cabin." He indicated the adjoining compartment with a nod.

"Sit down, old lad. What are you doing here?

I thought——" The speaker broke off abruptly, and his glance strayed involuntarily to the ground. The new-comer nodded, and, sitting down on the bunk, pushed his cap back from his forehead.

"That's right." He extended his left leg. "Cork foot. What d'you go on it, Bunje, eh?" They contemplated the acquisition in silence for a moment. "I was in a destroyer, you know," pursued the speaker, "and one of Fritz's shore batteries on the Belgian coast got our range by mistake one day at dawn. Dusted us down properly." He extended his leg again. "Hence the milk in the coco-nut, as you might say. However, we had a makee-learn doctor on board—Surgeon-Probationer, straight out of the egg, and no end of a smart lad: he dished me up in fine style. I went to hospital for a bit, and they gave me six months' full-pay sick leave—not a bad old firm, the Admiralty."

"What then," asked the other, "invalided?"

The visitor nodded. "But about a month ago I fell-in and said I couldn't kick my heels any longer. Hadn't two to kick, in point of fact!" He laughed softly at the grim jest. "So they lushed me up to this outfit, and gave me a job as King's Messenger. I'm carrying despatches between the Admiralty and the Fleet Flagship. Better'n doing nothing," he added half-apologetically.

"Quite," agreed Standish gravely: none knew better than he how beloved had been the career thus abruptly terminated. He wondered, as he met the

speaker's smiling eyes with a sympathetic grin, whether he himself could have carried it off like this. "But it was rotten luck—I'm——"

The King's Messenger rose. "I've got a drop of whisky somewhere in my bag," he interrupted. "Come along in there: I can't leave my despatches—we'll have a yarn."

He limped through the doorway, steadying himself with his hands against the rocking of the train. Standish followed. Never again, he reflected, would he follow those broad shoulders in a U.S. "Forward rush" to the familiar slogan of *"Feet—forwards—feet!"*

"You were wounded, too, last spring, weren't you?" queried the King's Messenger, burrowing in his suit-case for his flask. "Squat down at the end there—got your glass?" He measured out two portions of whisky and from the rack produced a bottle of soda. "Say when . . ."

Standish nodded. "Thanks—whoa! Yes, I got a couple of 'cushy' wounds and three months' leave."

The other turned, helping himself to soda-water. "Lor', yes, and you got spliced, too, Bunje!" He contemplated the Benedict over the rim of his tumbler with the whimsical faint curiosity with which the bachelor Naval Officer regards one of his brethren who has passed beyond the Veil.

"Yes." For a moment Standish assumed a thoughtful expression. Then he looked up, smiling.

"What about you, Podgie? Isn't it about time you toed the line?"

The King's Messenger shook his head. "No. It doesn't come my way." His eyes rested contemplatively on his outstretched leg. "Not very likely to either. . . . How d'you like the idea of joining up with the 'Great Silent' again after the flesh-pots and what-not?"

For the second time he had changed the conversation almost abruptly.

Standish lit his pipe. "What's it like up there now?" He jerked his head in the direction in which they were travelling. "How are they sticking it? Have you been up lately? I haven't been in the Grand Fleet yet."

"Yes, I was up—let's see, last week. Oh, they're all right. A bit bored, of course, but full of ginger. They go out and try to coax Fritz to come out and play from time to time. Fritz says 'Not in *these* trousers, I don't think,' and then they go home again, dodging 'tin fish'* and raking up Fritz's 'warts'† out of the Swept Channels. Talking of 'warts' reminds me of a yarn going round last time I was up—it's a chestnut now, but you may not have heard it. One of the mine-layers nipped down in a fog and laid a mine-field off the mouth of the Ems. It was a tricky bit of work, and it seems to have touched up the Padre's nerves a bit, because on the way back next morning, when he was reading prayers

*Torpedoes. †Mines.

—you know the bit about 'encompassed the waters with bounds'?—he said, 'Encompassed the bounders with warts,' which was just what they had done, pretty effectively!"

The door to the corridor was half-open, and a tall figure in Naval uniform who was passing at that moment glanced in, hesitated, and filled the doorway with his bulk. A slow smile spread over his face and showed his white, even teeth. It was a very infectious grin.

"How goes it, Podgie?" he said quietly.

The King's Messenger looked up. "Hallo!" he retorted. Then came recognition. "Thorogood, surely! Come in, old lad. What are you doing aboard the lugger—D'you know Standish?"

The new-comer nodded a greeting, acknowledging the introduction.

"Station-mates in the East Indies, weren't we?" said Standish.

"That's right," replied the other. "I remember you: we were both in camp together—way back in the 'Naughty Naughts.' We used to call you the India-rubber Man—Bunje for short."

Standish laughed. "They do still," he said, "mine own familiar friends."

"Have a drop of whisky," interrupted the King's Messenger. "'Fraid I haven't got a glass——"

The visitor hesitated. "Well, I've got old Mouldy Jakes in my compartment. Can I bring him

along: the old thing may get lonely. He was in your term in the *Britannia,* wasn't he?"

"He was. Fetch him along," said the King's Messenger. "Standish wants to know all about life in the Grand Fleet. You two ought to be able to enlighten him a bit between you."

Thorogood contemplated the India-rubber Man thoughtfully.

"Just joining up? Mouldy and I have been there since January, '15—I'll fetch him."

The speaker vanished and returned a moment later with a companion who wore a Lieutenant's uniform, and carried a tooth-glass in his hand. His lean, rather sallow face relaxed for an instant into a smile during the process of introduction, and then resumed a mask-like gravity. He up-ended a suit-case, sat down and silently eyed the others in turn.

"What have you two been doing?" asked the King's Messenger. "Been on leave?"

"Yes," replied Thorogood. "I met Mouldy this morning, and we had a day in town together."

"Brave man! I should be sorry to have had such a responsibility. What did you do?"

"Well, we lunched with my Uncle Bill at his club——"

"That was nice for Uncle Bill—what then?"

"Uncle Bill had to go to the Admiralty, so I took Mouldy for a walk in St. James's Park"—the speaker contemplated his friend sorrowfully—"and I lost him."

The King's Messenger laughed. "What happened to you, Mouldy?"

The officer addressed put his empty glass between his knees and proceeded to fill a cherry-wood pipe of villainous aspect from a Korean oiled-silk tobacco pouch.

"Took a flapper to the movies," was the grave and somewhat unexpected reply.

Thorogood, lounging in any easy attitude against the door, took up the tale of gallantry. "Apparently the star film of the afternoon was 'Britain's Sea-Dogs, or Jack-Tars at War,' and that appears to have been too much for our little Lord Fauntleroy. He slipped out unbeknownst to the fairy, and I found him at the club an hour later playing billiards with the marker."

The cavalier relaxed not a muscle of his sphinx-like gravity. "Never know what to do with myself on leave," he observed in sepulchral tones. "Always glad to get back. Like the fellow in the Bastille—what?" He raised his empty tumbler and scanned the light through it with sombre interest. "Long ship, this, James."

The phrase is an old Navy one, and signifies much the same thing as the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina.

"Sorry," apologised the host. "There isn't any more soda, I'm afraid, but——"

"Don't mind water," said his guest, diluting his

tot from the water-bottle. He turned to the India-rubber Man.

"What ship're you going to?" he asked.

Standish named the ship to which he had been appointed. The other took a sip of his whisky and water and nodded with the air of one whose worst misgivings had been confirmed.

"I remember now: I saw your appointment. James and I belong to her. We're going to be shipmates, then." He blew a cloud of smoke ceilingwards. "It's all right in one of those new ships: no scuttles: tinned air and electric light between decks: wake up every morning feeling's if you'd been gassed. An' the turrets——" He plunged gloomily into technicalities that conveyed the impression that the interior of a turret of the latest design was the short cut to a lunatic asylum. "I'm the Assistant Gunnery Lieutenant in our hooker, and I tell you it's a dirty business."

"What d'you do for exercise?" queried the India-rubber Man when the Assistant Gunnery Lieutenant lapsed again into gloomy silence.

"Plenty of that," said Thorogood. "Deck-hockey and medicine-ball—you mark out a tennis-court on the quarter-deck, you know, and heave a 9-lb. ball over a 5-ft. net—foursomes. Fine exercise." He spoke with the grave enthusiasm of the athlete, to whom the attainment of bodily fitness is very near to godliness indeed. "You can get a game of rugger when the weather is good enough to allow

landing, and there's quite a decent little 9-hole golf course. Oh, you can keep fit enough."

"How about the sailors—are they keeping cheery?"

Thorogood laughed. "They're amazing. Of course, we've got a real white man for a Skipper—and the Commander, too: that goes a long way. And they're away from drink and—other things that ain't good for 'em. Everybody has more leisure to devote to them than in peace-time: their amusements and recreations generally. Cinema shows and regattas, boxing championships, and all the rest of it. There's fifty per cent. less sickness and fewer punishments than we ever had in peace-time. Of course, it's an exile for the married men—it's rough on them, but on the whole there's jolly little grumbling."

"Yes," said the India-rubber Man. "It must be rough on the married men." He felt suddenly as if an immense period of time had passed since he said good-bye to Betty: and the next moment he felt that he had had enough of the others. He wanted to get along to his own compartment where the scent of violets had lingered.

He rose, stretching himself, and slipped his pipe into his pocket. "Well," he said, "'Sufficient unto the day.' I'm turning in now."

There was a little pause after his departure, and Thorogood prodded the bowl of his pipe reflectively.

"I wonder what's happened to the India-rubber

Man?" he said. "It's some time since I saw him last, but he's altered somehow. Not mouldy exactly, either. . . ."

"He's married," said the King's Messenger, staring at the shaded electric light overhead, as he sprawled with one elbow on the pillow.

Mouldy Jakes gave a little grunt. "Thought as much. They get like that." He spoke as if referring to the victims of an incomprehensible and ravaging disease. "An' it's always the good ones that get nabbed." He eyed the King's Messenger with an expression of melancholy omniscience. "Not so suspicious, you know."

"Well," said Thorogood, "that is as may be: but I'm off to bed. Come along, Mouldy."

The misogamist suffered himself to be led to the double-berthed compartment he shared with Thorogood.

The King's Messenger locked the door after their departure and got into pyjamas. For a long time he sat cross-legged on his bunk, nursing his maimed limb and staring into vacancy as the express roared on through the night. Finally, as if he had arrived at some conclusion, he shook his head rather sadly, turned in, and switched out the light.

"Good lad, Podgie," observed Thorogood reflectively to his companion, as he proceeded to undress.

Mouldy Jakes, energetically brushing his teeth over the tiny washing-basin, grunted assent.

"Ever met my cousin Cecily?" pursued Thorogood. "No, I don't think you did: she was at school when we stayed with Uncle Bill before the war."

"Shouldn't remember her if I had," mumbled the gallant.

"She's Uncle Bill's ward, and by way of being rather fond of Podgie, I fancy—at least, she used to be, I know. But the silly old ass won't go near her since he lost his foot."

Mouldy Jakes dried his tooth-brush, and, fumbling in his trouser pocket, produced a penny.

"Heads or tails?" he queried.

"Tails—why?"

"It's a head. Bags I the lower berth."

The India-rubber Man, in his compartment, had got into pyjamas and was sitting up in his bunk writing with a pencil and pad on his knees. When he had finished he stamped and addressed an envelope, rang for the attendant, and gave it to him to be posted at the next stopping-place. It bore an address in Queen's Gate, London, where at the moment the addressee, curled up in the centre of a very large bed, was doing her best in the darkness to keep a promise.

CHAPTER II

THE "NAVY SPECIAL"

RAILWAY travel appeals to the sailor-man. It provides him with ample leisure for conversation, sleep, or convivial song. When the possibilities of these absorbing pursuits are exhausted, remains a heightened interest in the next meal.

The pale February sunlight was streaming across snow-covered moorland that stretched away on either side of the line, when the Highland Express drew up at the first stopping place the following morning. From every carriage poured a throng of hungry bluejackets in search of breakfast. Many wore long coats of duffle or sheepskin provided by a maternal Admiralty in view of the severe weather conditions in the far North. The British bluejacket is accustomed to wear what he is told to wear, and further, to continue wearing it until he is told to put on something else. Hence a draft of men sent North to the Fleet from one of the Naval depots in the South of England would cheerfully don the duffle coats issued to them on departure and keep them on until they arrived at their destination, with an equal disregard for such outward circumstances as temperature or environment.

A night's journey in a crowded and overheated railway carriage, muffled in such garb, would not commend itself to the average individual as an ideal prelude to a hearty breakfast. Yet the cheerful, sleepy-eyed crowd of apparently par-boiled Arctic explorers that invaded the restaurant buffet vociferously demanding breakfast, appeared on the best of terms with themselves, one another and the world at large.

A score or more of officers besieged a flustered girl standing beside a pile of breakfast baskets, and the thin, keen morning air resounded with banter and voices. The King's Messenger, freshly shaven and pink of countenance (a woman once likened his face to that of a cherub looked at through a magnifying glass), stood at the door of his carriage and exchanged morning greetings with travellers of his acquaintance. Then the guard's whistle sounded; the noise and laughter redoubled along the platform and a general scramble ensued. Doors slammed down the length of the train, and the damsel in charge of the breakfast baskets raised her voice in lamentation.

"Ane o' the gentlemen hasna paid for his basket!" she cried. Heads appeared at windows, and the owner of one extended a half-crown. "It's my friend in here," he explained. "His name is Mouldy Jakes, and he can't speak for himself because his mouth is too full of bacon; but he wishes me to say that he's awfully sorry he forgot. He was struck

all of a heap at meeting a lady so early in the morning. . . ." The speaker vanished abruptly, apparently jerked backwards by some mysterious agency. The train started.

The maiden turned away with a simper. "It was no his friend at all," she observed to the young lady from the buffet, who had emerged to wave farewell to a bold, bad Engine Room Artificer after a desperate flirtation of some forty seconds' duration. "It was himself."

"They're a' sae bonsie!" said the young lady from the buffet with a rapturous sigh.

At the junction where the train stopped at noon, Naval occupation of the North proclaimed itself. A Master-at-Arms, austere of visage and stentorian voiced, fell upon the weary voyagers like a collie rallying a flock of sheep. A Lieutenant-Commander of the Reserve, in a tattered monkey-jacket, was superintending the unstowing of bags and hammocks by a party of ancient mariners in white working rig and brown gaiters. A retired Boatswain, who apparently bore the responsibilities of local Traffic Superintendent upon his broad shoulders, held sage council with the engine driver.

The travellers were still many weary hours from their destination, but the solicitude of the great Mother Fleet for her sons' welfare was plain on every side. There were evidences of a carefully planned, wisely executed organisation in the speed with which the great crowd of bluejackets and

marines of all ranks and ratings, and bound for fifty different ships, were mustered, given their dinners and marshalled into the "Navy Special" that would take them on their journey.

Mouldy Jakes deposited his bags and rug strap on the platform and surveyed the scene with mournful pride. "Good old Navy!" he observed to the India-rubber Man, while Thorogood went in search of food. "Good old firm! Father and mother and ticket collector and supplier of ham-sandwiches to us all. Who wouldn't sell his little farm and go to sea?"

Standish picked up his suit-case and together they made for the adjoining platform, where the train that was to take them on their journey was waiting.

They selected a carriage and were presently joined by Thorogood, burdened with eatables and soda-water. The bluejackets were already in their carriages, and the remaining officers, to the number of about a score, were settling down in their compartments. They represented all ranks of the British Navy; a Captain and two Commanders were joined by the Naval Attaché of a great neutral Power on his way to visit the Fleet. An Engineer Commander and a Naval Instructor shared a luncheon basket with a Sub-Lieutenant and a volunteer Surgeon. Two Clerks, a Midshipman and a Torpedo Gunner found themselves thrown together, and at the last moment a Chaplain added himself to their company.

The last door closed and the King's Messenger, carrying his despatch case, came limping along the platform in company with the grey-bearded Commander in charge of the base. The King's Messenger climbed into his carriage and the journey was resumed. Along the shores of jade-tinted lochs, through far-stretching deer forest and grouse moor, past brawling rivers of "snow-brew," and along the flanks of shale-strewn hills, the "Navy Special" bore its freight of sailor-men.

No corridor connected the carriages to afford opportunities for an interchange of visits for gossip and change of companionship. The occupants of each compartment settled down grimly to endure the monotony of the last stage of their journey according to the dictates of their several temperaments.

The King's Messenger, in the seclusion of his reserved compartment, read a novel at intervals and looked out of the window for familiar landmarks that recalled spells of leave in pre-war days, when he tramped on two feet through the heather behind the dogs, or, thigh deep in some river, sent a silken line out across the peat-brown water.

In an adjoining compartment a Lieutenant of the Naval Reserve sat at one end facing a Lieutenant of the Volunteer Reserve, while a small Midshipman, effaced behind a magazine, occupied the other corner. Conversation, stifled by ham sandwiches, restarted fitfully, and flagged from train weariness. Darkness pursued the whirling landscape and blotted it out.

Sleep overtook the majority of the travellers until the advent of tea baskets at the next stopping place revived them to a more lively interest in life and one another.

The Reserve Lieutenant fussed over his like a woman. "I wouldn't trouble if I never smelt whisky again," he confided to his vis-à-vis, "but I couldn't get on without tea." He helped himself to three lumps of sugar.

The ice thinned rapidly.

"*With* fresh milk," said the Volunteer Reserve man appreciatively, pouring himself out a cup. "Eh, Jennings?"

The Midshipman, thus addressed, grinned and applied himself in silence to a scone and jam.

"Ah," said the Reserve man with a kind of tolerance in his tone, such as a professional might extend to the enthusiasm of an amateur in his own trade. "Cows scarce in your job?"

"A bit," was the unruffled reply. "We've just brought a Norwegian wind-jammer in from the South of Iceland. . . ." He indicated with a nod the young gentleman in the corner, who was removing traces of jam from his left cheek. "I'm bringing the armed guard back to our base."

The Reserve man drank his tea after the manner of deep-sea sailor-men. That is to say, you could shut your eyes and still know he was drinking hot tea.

"Armed Merchant-cruiser squadron?" he queried. Imperceptibly his tone had changed. The Armed

Merchant-cruisers maintain the Allied blockade across the trade routes of the Far North: "fancy" sailor-men do not apply for jobs in one of these amazons of the North Sea, and it takes more than a Naval uniform to bring a suspect sailing ship many miles into port for examination under an armed guard of four men.

The Volunteer nodded. "We had a picnic, I can tell you. It blew like hell from the N.E., and the foretopmast—she was a barque—went like a carrot the second day. We hove to, trying to rig a jury mast, when up popped a Fritz."* The speaker laughed, a pleasant, deep laugh of complete enjoyment. "I thought we were in for a swim that would knock the cross-Channel record silly! However, I borrowed a suit from the skipper—and he wasn't what you'd call fastidious in his dress either——"

The Volunteer made a little grimace at the recollection, because he was a man of refined tastes and raced his own yacht across the Atlantic in peace time.

"It was too rough to board, but the submarine closed to within hailing distance, and a little pip-squeak of a Lieutenant, nervous as a cat, talked to us through a megaphone. Fortunately I can speak Norwegian. . . ."

"What about the skipper of the windjammer?" interrupted the other.

"He kept his mouth shut. Wasn't much in sym-

* Submarine.

pathy with the company that owned the submarine, having lost a brother the month before in a steamship shelled and sunk without warning. You can't please everybody, it seems, when you start out to act mad in a submarine. Well, this lad examined our papers through a glass and I chucked him a cigar. . . . He hadn't had a smoke for a week. Then he sheered off, because he saw something on the horizon that scared him. He was very young, and, as I've said, nerves like fiddle strings."

The Reserve man lit a cigarette and inhaled a great draught of smoke. There was something in his alert, intent expression reminiscent of a bull terrier when he hears rats scuffling behind a wainscot.

The war has evolved specialists without number in branches of Naval warfare hitherto unknown and unsuspected. Among these is the Submarine Hunter. The Reserve man belonged to this type, which is simply a reversion to the most primitive and savage of the fighting instincts. At the first mention of the German submarine he leaned forward eagerly.

"Threw him a cigar, did you?" he said grimly. "Sorry I wasn't there. I'd have thrown him something. That's my line of business—Fritz-hunting."

The ribbon of the Distinguished Service Cross on the lapel of his monkey-jacket showed that he apparently pursued this branch of sport with some effect. "Been at it from the kick-off," he continued. "Started with herring nets, you know!" He laughed a deep bark of amusement. "Lord! We had a lot

to learn. We began from an East Coast fishing port, working with crazy drifters manned by East Coast fishermen. There was a retired Admiral in charge, as tough an old terror as ever pulled on a sea boot—and half a dozen of us all together, some Active Service and some Reserve like me. Navy? Bless you, *we* were the Navy, that old Admiral and us six." The speaker raised his voice to make plain his words above the rattle of the train. "There was a lot of talk in the papers about Jellicoe and Beatty and the Grand Fleet and the Battle Cruisers, but they didn't come our way and we didn't trouble them. We had a couple of score of trawlers and drifters and four hundred simple fishermen to cram the fear of the Lord into. That was *our* job!"

He spoke with the peculiar word-sparing vividness of the man to whom the Almighty had vouchsafed the mysterious gift of handling other men. "Long-shore and deep-sea fishermen, good material, damned good, but they took a lot of coaxing." He paused and contemplated his hands resting on his knees. Scarred by frost-bite they were, with huge bones protruding like knuckle-dusters. "Coaxing, mind you," he repeated. "I've been chief of an Argentine cattle-boat for four years and Second on a windjammer round the Horn for three years before that. I know when to drive and when to coax. Never touched a man, sir." He paused, rubbing off the moisture condensed on the window, to peer into the night.

Here, then, was an Apostle of Naval Discipline among a community of fishermen whose acknowledged tradition it was to get drunk when and where it suited their inclinations, to put to sea in the top-hats of their ancestors and return to harbour as weather or the fish dictated, whose instinctive attitude towards strangers was about as encouraging as that of the Solomon Islanders.

"We took 'em and trained 'em—gradually, you understand. Taught 'em to salute the King's uniform, an' just why orders had to be obeyed: explained it all gently"—the stupendous hand made a gesture in the air as if stroking something. "Then after a while we moved 'em on to something else—the Game itself, in fact—and my merry men tumbled to it in no time. It was in their blood, I guess. They'd hunted something all their lives, and they weren't scared because they had to take on something a bit bigger. I tell you, after a few weeks I just prayed for a submarine to come along and show what we could do."

The Volunteer grinned understandingly. "Well?" he said.

"We got one a week later. Just for all the world like a bloomin' salmon. First we knew that there was one about was the *Merrie Maggie,* one of our trawlers, blowing up. Well, I'd been over the same spot in the morning, and there were no mines there then, so I knew our friend wasn't far off. . . ." The Submarine Hunter mused for a moment, staring at

his clasped hands, with the faint blue tattoo-marks showing under the tan. "We got him at dawn—off a headland. . . . Oh, best bit of sport that ever I had!" The speaker's hard grey eye softened at the recollection. "We've got lots since, but never one as neat as that. He just came to the surface and showed his tail-fin and——" the huge hands made a significant downward gesture.

If you have ever heard a Regimental Bombing Officer describe the clearing of an enemy traverse, you will understand the complete expressiveness of that gesture.

"I'm going North now to join a new base up there. There are one or two dodges that I can put them up to, I reckon."

The Volunteer filled and lit a pipe.

"Pretty work it sounds. Ours is duller, on the whole, but we get our share of excitement. You never sight a steamer flying neutral colours without the possibility of her hoisting the German ensign and slipping a torpedo into you. That's why we introduced the Red Pendant business. It meant inconvenience for all parties, but neutrals have only got the Hun to thank for it."

"Never heard of it," said the other. "Fritz-hunting is my game."

"Well, you see, ever since they've tried to slip raiders through the blockade we can't afford to close a stranger flying neutral colours within gun or torpedo range. So we had to explain to neutrals that

a red flag hoisted by one of our merchant cruisers is the signal to heave to instantly, and that brings her up well out of range. Then we drop a boat and steam off and signal her to close the boat, and the boarding officer goes on board and examines her papers. If she's got a cargo without guarantees she's sent into one of the examination ports under an armed guard to have it overhauled properly."

"For contraband?"

"Yes, and to see that the commodity she carries isn't in excess of the ration allowed to the country of destination—if she's eastward bound, that is. Also the passengers are scrutinised for suspects, and so on; it's a big job, one way and another. That's all done by the Examination Service at the port, though, and I don't envy them the job. We only catch 'em and bring 'em in."

For a while longer he talked between puffs at his pipe of the "twilight service" rendered by the Armed Merchant-cruisers. He spoke of grim stern-chases under the Northern Lights, of perils from ice and submarines and winter gales, while the Allied strangle-hold tightened month by month, remorselessly, relentlessly.

"It's a peaceful sort of job, though, on the whole," he concluded. "Nobody worries us. The public, most of 'em, don't know we exist. Journalists don't want to come and visit us much," he chuckled. "We don't find our way into the illustrated papers. . . ."

"That's right," said the Submarine Hunter. "That's the way to work in war-time. If I had my way——"

A jarring shudder ran through the train as the brakes were applied and the speed slackened. The Reserve Man lowered the window and peered out into the darkness. A flurry of snow drifted into the dimly lighted carriage.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated. "We're here. Bless me, how the time goes when one gets yarning."

The Volunteer rose and held out his hand.

"My name is Armitage," he said, and named two exclusive clubs, one in London and the other in New York. "Look me up after the war if you pass that way."

The Submarine Hunter took the proffered hand in his formidable grip.

"Pleased to have met you. Mine's Gedge. I don't own a club, but the Liverpool Shipping Federation generally knows my address. And the girls from Simonstown to Vladivostock will tell you if I've passed that way!"

He threw back his head, displaying the muscular great throat above his collar, and laughed like a mischievous boy.

"Good luck!" he said.

"Good hunting!" replied the Volunteer.

He turned to the Midshipman. "Come along, sonny, shake the sleep out of your eyes and go and collect our little party."

Outside in the snowy darkness the great concourse of men was being mustered: lanterns gleamed on wet oilskins and men's faces. Hoarse voices and the tramp of heavy boots through the slush heralded the passage along the platform of each draft as they marched to the barrier. A cold wind cut through the cheerless night like a knife.

Armitage paused for a moment to accustom his eyes to the darkness.

"Here we are, Mouldy," said a clear-cut, well-bred voice out of the darkness surrounding a pile of luggage. "Here's our stuff. Get a truck, old thing!"

Armitage turned in the direction of the voice: as he did so a passing lantern flashed on the face of a Lieutenant stooping over some portmanteaux.

"I thought as much," he said. "Thought I recognised the voice." He stepped towards the speaker and rested his hand on his shoulder. "James Thorogood, isn't it?" he said.

The other straightened up and peered through the darkness at the face of the Volunteer Lieutenant. "Yes," he replied, "but it's devilish dark—I can't——"

"I'm Armitage," said the other.

Thorogood laughed. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Were you in the train? I didn't see you before——"

"Neither did I," was the reply, "but I heard your voice and recognised it. How is Sir William?"

"Uncle Bill? Oh, he's all right. Hard at work on some comic invention of his, as usual."

The other nodded. "Well, give him my love when you write, and tell him I've struck the type of man he wants for that experiment of his. I'll write to him, though. Now I must go and find my little party of braves—bringing an armed guard back to our base. Good-bye and good luck to you."

They shook hands, and the Volunteer half turned away. An afterthought appeared to strike him, however, and he stopped.

"By the way," he added, "how's Miss Cecily? Well, I hope?"

"She's all right, thanks," was the reply. "I'll tell her I've seen you."

"Will you? Yes, thank you. And will you say I—I am looking forward to seeing her again next time I come South?"

The speaker moved away into the darkness. At that moment appeared Mouldy Jakes, panting behind a barrow. "Who's that old bird?" he queried.

"Another of 'em," replied Thorogood.

"'Nother of what?"

"Cecily's hopeless attachments. He's a pal of Uncle Bill's, and as rich as Crœsus. Amateur deep sea yachtsman before the war. He's awfully gone on Cecily."

"'Counts for him hanging round your neck, I s'pose," commented the student of human nature. "Sort of 'dweller-near-the-rose' business. Heave that

suit-case over—unless you can find any more of your cousin's admirers sculling about the country. P'raps they'll load this truck for us and shove it to the boat. Ah, here's Podgie!"

A moment later the King's Messenger joined the group.

"Will you all come and have supper with me at the hotel?" he said. "It's the last meal you'll get on terra firma for some time to come. I've got a car waiting outside."

Mouldy Jakes heaved the last of the bags on to the hand-cart and enlisted the services of a superannuated porter drifting past in the darkness. The King's Messenger had slipped his arm inside Thorogood's, and the two moved on towards the barrier.

"Has your wife got a young brother?" asked Mouldy Jakes abruptly as he and the India-rubber Man followed in the wake of the porter and the barrow.

"Yes," replied Standish. "A lad called Joe—cadet at Dartmouth."

"Did you ever ask him to dinner—before you were engaged, I mean?" pursued the inquisitor.

The India-rubber Man laughed.

"Well, not dinner exactly. But I went down to Osborne College once and stood him a blow-out at the tuck-shop."

His companion nodded darkly in the direction of the King's Messenger.

"Shouldn't wonder if Thorogood was feeling like that lad Joe. Useful fellow to travel with, Thorogood."

CHAPTER III

Ultima Thule

ACROSS the stormy North Sea came the first faint streak of dawn. It overtook a long line of Destroyers rolling landward with battered bridge-screens and salt-crusted funnels; it met a flotilla of mine-sweeping Sloops, labouring patiently out to their unending task. It lit the frowning cliffs, round which wind-tossed gulls wailed and breakers had thundered the beat of an ocean's pulse throughout the ages.

The Destroyers were not sorry to see the dawn. The night was their task-master: in darkness they worked and in the Shadow of Death. They passed within hailing distance of the Sloops, and on board the reeling Destroyers here and there a figure in streaming oilskins raised his arm and waved a salutation to the squat grey craft setting forth in the comfortless dawn to holystone Death's doorstep.

The Mine-sweepers refrained from any such amenity. Anon the darkness would come again, when no man may sweep for mines. Then would be their turn for grins and the waving of arms. In the meanwhile, they preferred to remain grim and jestless as their work.

Presently the Destroyers, obedient to a knotted tangle of flags at the yardarm of their leader, altered course a little; they were making for an opening in the wall of rock, on either side of which gaunt promontories thrust their naked shoulders into the surf. The long black, viperish hulls passed through under the ever-watchful eyes of the shore batteries, and the hooded figures on the Destroyer bridges threw back their duffle cowls and wiped the night's accumulation of dried spray and cinders out of the puckers round their tired eyes.

The Commanding Officer of the leading Destroyer leaned across the bridge-rails and stared round at the ring of barren islands encircling the great expanse of water into which they had passed, the naked, snow-powdered hills in the background: at the greyness and desolation of earth and sky and sea.

"Home again!" he said in an undertone to the Lieutenant beside him. "It ain't much of a place to look at, but I'm never sorry to see it again after a dusting like we got last night."

The Lieutenant raised the glasses slung round his neck by a strap and levelled them at a semi-globular object that had appeared on the surface some distance away. "There's old Tirpitz waiting to say good morning as usual."

The Commander laughed. "Rum old devil he is. That's where the Hun has the pull over us. He's got something better than a seal to welcome

him back to harbour—when he *does* get back!"

"When he does, yes." The other chuckled. "Gretchens an' iron crosses an' joy bells. Lord, I'd love to see 'em, wouldn't you? Just for five minutes!"

The Commander moved across to the tiny binnacle. "I'd rather see my own wife for five minutes," he replied. Then, raising his voice, "Starboard ten!"

"Starboard ten, sir," repeated the voice of the helmsman.

The Commander stood with watchful eye on the swinging compass card. "Midships . . . steady!"

"Steady, sir!" sang the echo at the wheel. The Commander glanced aft through the trail of smoke at the next astern swinging round in the smother of his wake. "Well, we shan't be long now before we tie up to the buoy—curse these fellows! Here come all the drifters with mails and ratings for the Fleet. . . . Port five!"

"Port five, sir!" The flotilla altered course disdainfully to avoid a steamdrifter which wallowed through the wake of the Destroyers in the direction of the distant fleet, still shrouded by the morning mist. "That's the King's Messenger going off to the Fleet Flagship. There come the others, strung out in a procession, making for the different squadrons. Wake up, you son of Ham!" The speaker stepped to the lanyard of the syren and jerked it savagely. Obedient to the warning wail another drifter altered course in reluctant compliance with

the Rule of the Road. "I'd rather take the flotilla through Piccadilly Circus than manœuvre among these Fleet Messengers! They're bad enough on the high seas in peace-time with their nets out, but booming about inside a harbour they're enough to turn one's hair grey."

If the truth be told, the past had known no great love lost between the Destroyers and the fishing fleet. Herring-nets round a propeller are not calculated to bind hearts together in brotherly affection. Perhaps dim recollections of bygone mishaps of this nature had soured the Destroyer Commander's heart towards the steam-drifter.

On the outbreak of war, however, the steam fishing fleets became an arm of the great Navy itself, far-reaching as its own squadrons. They exchanged their nets for guns and mine-sweeping paraphernalia: they became submarine hunters, mine-sweepers, fleet-messengers and patrollers of the great commerce sea-ways in the South. They became a little Navy within the Navy, in fact, already boasting their own peculiar traditions, and probably as large a proportion of D.S.C.'s as any other branch of the mother Service.

They are a slow, crab-gaited community that clings to gold earrings and fights in jerseys and thigh boots from which the fish-scales have not altogether departed. Ashore, on the other hand (where their women rule), they consent to the peaked cap and brass buttons of His Majesty's uniform, and

wear it, moreover, with the coy self-consciousness of a bulldog in a monogrammed coat.

Link by link they have built up a chain of associations with the parent Navy that will not be easily broken when the time comes for these little auxiliaries to return to their peaceful calling. They have worked side by side with the dripping Submarine: they have sheltered through storms in the lee of anchored Battleships; they have piloted proud Cruisers through the newly-swept channels of a mine-field, and brought a Battle-cruiser Squadron its Christmas mail in the teeth of a Northern blizzard. In token of these things, babies born in fishing villages from the Orkneys to the Nore have been christened after famous Admirals and men-of-war, that the new generation shall remember.

The drifter that had altered course slowly came round again when the last of the Destroyers swept past, and the three figures in the bows ducked as she shipped a bucket of spray and flung it aft over the tiny wheel-house. One of the figures turned and stared after the retreating hulls.

"Confound 'em," he said. "Just like the blooming Destroyers, chucking their weight about as if they owned creation, and making us take their beastly wash." He took off his cap and shook the salt water from it. One of the other two chuckled. "Never mind, Mouldy, it will be your turn to laugh next time we go to sea, when you're perched on the forebridge sixty feet above the waterline, and watch-

ing our Destroyer-screen shipping it green over their funnels."

Mouldy Jakes shook his head gloomily. "Laugh!" he echoed. "Then I'd get shoved under arrest by the skipper under suspicion of being drunk."

The drifter rounded an outlying promontory of one of the islands, and Thorogood raised his hand. "There you are," he said, "there's our little lot!" He indicated with a nod the Battle-fleet of Britain.

"And very nice too," said the India-rubber Man, staring in the direction of the other's gaze. "Puts me in mind, as they say, of a picture I saw once. 'National Insurance,' I think it was called."

A shaft of sunlight had struggled through a rift in the clouds and fell athwart the dark waters of the harbour. In the far distance, outlined against the sombre hills and lit by the pale sunshine, a thicket of tripod masts rose towering above the grey hulls of the anchored Battle-fleet.

As the drifter drew near the different classes of ships became distinguishable. A squadron of Light Cruisers were anchored between them and the main Fleet, with a thin haze of smoke hovering above their raking funnels. Beyond them, line upon line, in a kind of sullen majesty, lay the Battleships. Seen thus in peace-time, a thousand glistening points of burnished metal, the white of the awnings, smooth surfaces of enamel, varnish and gold-leaf would have caught the liquid sunlight and concealed the menace of that stern array.

Now, however, stripped of awnings, with bare decks, stark as gladiators, sombre and terrible, they conveyed a relentless significance heightened by the desolation of their surroundings.

From the offing came the rumble of heavy gunfire.

"Don't be alarmed," said Thorogood to the India-rubber Man, who had turned in the direction of the sound; "we haven't missed the bus!" He looked along the lines with a swift, practised eye. "It's only some of the Battle-cruisers out doing target practice. That's our squadron, there." He pointed ahead. "We're the second ship in that line."

The drifter passed up a broad lane, on either side of which towered grey steel walls, unbroken by scuttles or embrasures; above them the muzzles of guns hooded by casemates and turrets, the mighty funnels, piled up bridges and superstructures, frowned down like the battlements of fortresses. Men, dwarfed by the magnitude of their environment to the size of ants, and clad in jerseys and white working-rig, swarmed about the decks and batteries.

"There's the Fleet Flagship," continued Thorogood, pointing. "That ship with the drifters round her, flying the Commander-in-Chief's flag. That's where Podgie was bound for. Rummy to think he'll be back in London again in a couple of day's time!"

A seaplane that had been riding on the surface near the Fleet Flagship's quarter, rose like a flying

gull, circled in wide spirals over the Fleet and sped seawards. Across the lanes of water, armed picket-boats, with preternaturally grave-faced Midshipmen at their wheels, picked their way amongst the traffic of drifters, cutters under sail, hooting store carriers and puffers from the distant base.

Mouldy Jakes contemplated the busy scene without undue enthusiasm.

"Everything seems to be much the same as usual," was his dry comment. "They seem to have got on all right without me for the last seven days. We've had a coat of paint, too. Wonder what's up. P'raps the King's coming to pay us a visit. Or else the Commander reckons it's about time to beat up for his promotion."

The skipper of the drifter jerked the miniature telegraph to "Slow," and a hoary-headed deck-hand stumped into the bows with a heaving line coiled over his arm. The drifter crept up under the quarter of a Battleship that towered above them into the grey sky.

A tall, thin Lieutenant with a telescope under his arm looked down from the quarter-deck and made a gesture of greeting.

"Hullo, Tweedledum," said Thorogood; and added, "Bless me, Tweedledum's shaved his beard off!"

"Must be the King, then," said Mouldy gloomily. "Means I shall have to order another monkey-jacket." A bull terrier thrust a python-like head

between the rails and wagged his tail. The drifter grated her fenders alongside and made fast.

The three officers climbed the swaying ladder to the upper deck, and were greeted in turn by the tall Lieutenant with the telescope. "You're Standish, aren't you?" he asked, turning to the India-rubber Man. "The Commander wants to see you—you're an old shipmate of his, it seems?" He led the way as he spoke towards a door in the after superstructure.

"Yes," was the reply. "He was the First Lieutenant in my last ship—with this Skipper."

"Ah," said the other, "she must have been a good ship then."

They skirted a hatchway in the interior of the superstructure that yawned into the electric-lit interior of the ship, past cabins opening on to the foremost side of them, and stopped at a curtained doorway. A square of polished mahogany was screwed into the bulkhead beside it, with the following inscription in brass letters:

DON'T KNOCK.
COME IN.

The Officer of the Watch drew back the curtain and motioned to his companion to enter. "Lieutenant Commander Standish, sir," he said.

The Commander, who was writing at a knee-hole table, turned and rose with his grave, slow smile.

"Come in, Bunje," he said, holding out his hand.

"Very glad you've got here at last." He laid his left hand for an instant on the India-rubber Man's shoulder and searched his face with kindly grey eyes. "How're the wounds and the wife and all the other things you've collected since I saw you last?"

The India-rubber Man laughed.

"They're all right, sir, thanks." He glanced at the cap, with its gold oak leaves adorning the brim, lying on the desk. "I haven't congratulated you on your promotion yet," he added. "I was awfully glad to hear you had got your 'brass hat'!"

The Commander laughed. "I still turn round when anyone sings out 'Number One,'" he replied. "I was beginning to feel as if I'd been a First Lieutenant all my life! Seems quite funny not to be chivvying round after the flat-sweepers." He resumed his seat. "Well, you'll find a few of the old lot here: there's the Skipper of course, and Double-O Gerrard—d'you remember the A.P.? And little Pills: he's Staff Surgeon now, and no end of a nut. . . . Let's see—oh, yes, and young Bowles: he used to be one of our snotties, if you remember. 'Kedgeree,' the others called him. He's Sub of the Gunroom. That's about all of the old lot in the Channel Fleet. But I think you'll like all the rest. It's a very happy mess."

The India-rubber Man was roving round the cabin examining photographs.

"Hullo!" he said. "You've poor old Torp's photo here."

"Yes," was the reply. "I—I met a woman when I was on leave, of whom he was very fond. She had two of his photographs and gave me that one." The Commander had risen to his feet and was staring out of the scuttle with absent eyes. "But, come along. The Skipper wants to see you, and then I'll take you along to the mess. It's getting on for lunch time. What sort of a journey did you have?"

Still chatting they left the superstructure and passed aft along the spacious quarterdeck, where, round the flanks of the great superimposed turrets, a part of the watch were sweeping down the deck and squaring off ropes. The Commander led the way down a hatchway aft to an electric-lit lobby, where a marine sentry clicked to attention as they passed, and opened a door in the after bulkhead. They crossed the fore cabin extending the whole beam of the ship, and entered the after cabin.

Unlike other cabins on the main deck, this was lit by scuttles in the ship's side, and right aft, big armoured doors opened on to the stern walk. It lacked conspicuously the adornments usually associated with the Captain's apartment. Bare corticene covered the deck; the walls of white enamelled steel were unadorned save for a big scale chart of the North Sea and a coloured map of the Western Front. A few framed photographs stood on the big roll-topped desk in one corner, and a bowl of purple heather occupied the flat mahogany top to

the tiled stove where an electric radiator glowed. A bundle of singlesticks and a pair of foils stood in the corner near an open bookcase; a padded "chesterfield" and a few chairs completed the austere furnishing of the cabin.

The Captain was standing before a deal table supported by trestles, which occupied the deck space beneath the open skylight. On the table, amid the litter of glue-pots, cardboard, thread and varnish, stood a model of a Super-Dreadnought. He turned at the entry of the Commander and his companion, laying down a pair of scissors.

"Good morning, Standish," he said. "Glad to see you again. I won't offer to shake hands—mine are covered with glue." He smiled in the whimsical humorous way that always went straight to another man's heart. "We're all returning to our second childhood up here, you see!" He indicated the model. "This is my device for keeping out of mischief. When finished I hope it will fill a similar rôle for the benefit of my son, Cornelius James."

Standish examined the model with interest and delight.

"What a ripping bit of work, sir," he said. It was, indeed, a triumph of patient ingenuity and craftsmanship.

"It's an improvement on wood-carving," was the reply. "All working parts, you see." The Captain set in motion some internal mechanism, and the turret guns, trained slowly on to the beam. He

pressed a button. "Electric bow and steaming lights!" His voice had a ring of almost boyish enthusiasm, and he picked up a tangle of threads from the table. "But this fore-derrick purchase is the devil, though. All last evening I was on the sheaves of one of the double blocks—maddening work. Hornby's designing a hydraulic lift to the engine-room; column of water concealed in the foremast, d'you see? When's that going to be finished, Hornby?"

The Commander laughed. "We'll have it done in time for Corney's birthday, sir."

The Captain turned from the model. "Well, Standish," he said, "all this"—he nodded at the work of his patient hands—"all this looks rather as if we never had anything better to do! As a matter of fact, it's only during the winter that one finds time for anything. We're pretty busy, one way and another, you'll find. It'll take you some time to learn your way round your turret, I expect. Jakes appears to find his an object of some interest—do you know him, by the way?" The Captain's humorous blue eyes twinkled.

"Yes, I travelled up with him, sir. He mentioned the turret."

"He probably did. He spends most of his life in his. Well, I'm glad you've turned up in time for the Regatta. Our Wardroom crew wants a bit of weight. I told the Admiral we were going to win the cock—the Squadron trophy—this year, so

you must see what you can do about it. Also, I want you to look after the Midshipmen. They're a good lot, and there's one in particular—Harcourt, isn't it, Commander?—who ought to pull off the Midshipmen's Lightweights if he can keep down to the weight. One or two want shaking up—Lettigne's too fat—— However, you probably want to sling your hammock; hope you'll be comfortable." The Captain nodded dismissal. As they reached the door the Captain spoke again. "By the way," he said, "the children send their love. . . ."

"Now," said the Commander as they emerged, "it's nearly lunch time. Come along to the smoking-room."

They ascended again to the upper deck and forward of the superstructure, descended a hatchway to the main deck. An open door in the armoured bulkhead gave a glimpse forward of a gun battery and a teeming mess-deck intent on its mid-day meal, where men jostled each other so thickly round the crowded mess tables that it seemed incredible that anyone could live for years in such surroundings and retain an individuality.

They turned away and passed aft down an electric-lit alley-way. A door on the right opened for a moment as they passed, and emitted the strains of a gramophone and a boy's laughter.

"That's the Gunroom," said the Commander. He led the way round a corner and past the bloated trunk of an air-shaft to the other side of the ship.

"Here we are," he said, and opened a mahogany door in the white bulkhead, stepping aside to allow the other to enter a smallish square apartment lit by a skylight overhead and hazy with tobacco smoke. A few padded settees and arm-chairs and a piano of venerable aspect, together with a table covered by magazines and papers, comprised the furniture; half-a-dozen coloured prints and a baize-covered notice board completed the adornment of the walls. Through a doorway beyond came the hum of conversation and clatter of knives and forks, where, in the Wardroom, lunch had already commenced. About half-a-dozen members of the Mess, however, still occupied the smoking-room; the nearest to the door, a short, slightly built Staff Surgeon, in the act of shaking angostura bitters into a glass which a steward proffered on a tray, turned his head as the newcomers entered.

"Bunje!" he cried, and put the bitters down. "Bunje! my son, Bunje! Oh, frabjous day, Calloo, Callay! My arms enfold ye. . . ." He enveloped the India-rubber Man in a bear-like embrace. "Behold the prodigal returning! Steward, bring hither a fatted calf and the swizzle-stick. Put a cherry in it and a slice of lemon and eke crushed ice. My dear life!" He held the India-rubber Man at an arm's length. "Bunje, these are moments when strong men sob like little children. But let me introduce you."

The occupants of the smoking-room, grinning,

came forward to greet the new messmate. The Staff Surgeon named them in turn.

"This is the P.M.O. He's plus two at golf. I mention that in case he offers to take you ashore and play you for half-a-crown. P.M.O., this is Standish, a wounded hero and a friend of my care-free youth." The speaker rolled his r's, thrust his hand into the bosom of his monkey-jacket and struck a histrionic attitude.

"Seated on the settee," he resumed, "caressing an overfed bull terrier, we have Tweedledee, likewise overfed. Get up and say how d'you do to the gentleman, Tweedledee."

A short, chubby-faced Lieutenant rose and shook hands rather shyly.

"Now," pursued the Doctor, "casting our eyes round the room at random we see the Pilot—otherwise known as the 'Merry Wrecker.' The portly gentleman in clerical garb helping himself to a cigarette out of someone else's tin—His Eminence the Padre. The Captain of Marines you see consuming gin and bitters: title of picture, 'Celebrities and Their Hobbies.' This is the Engineer Commander. He is considerably senior to me and I therefore refrain from being witty at his expense. Taking advantage of the general confusion caused by your arrival, the First Lieutenant selects this moment to peep into the turgid pages of an illustrated Parisian journal I regret to say this mess contributes to."

The lecturer paused for breath. A tall, florid-

faced Lieutenant Commander with a broken nose, who had been leaning over the paper table, pipe in mouth, straightened up with a chuckle and ostentatiously fluttered the pages of the *Times*. He eyed the Staff Surgeon reflectively for a moment and turned to the Captain of Marines.

"Have we had enough, do you think, Soldier?" he asked in a voice of ominous quiet.

"I almost think so," replied the Captain of Marines. He finished his *apéritif* and stared absently at the skylight overhead.

"Pills, dear," said the First Lieutenant in honeyed accents, "we're afraid you are showing off before a stranger. There is only one penalty for that."

"The Glory-hole," said the Captain of Marines, and hurled himself on the Staff Surgeon. The First Lieutenant followed suit, and between them they dragged their struggling victim to the door.

The bull terrier leaped around them with hysterical yelps of excitement.

"Open the door, Padre," gasped the Captain of Marines as the struggle swayed to and fro. "Garm, you fool, shut up!"

The Chaplain complied with the request with alacrity, and the three interlocked figures and the ecstatic dog floundered through out into the flat.

Just outside, in an angle formed by the armour of the turret and the Wardroom bulkhead, was a small cupboard. It was used by the flat-sweeper and messengers for the stowage of brooms, polishing

paste, caustic soda and other appliances of their craft, and was just large enough to hold a small man upright.

Into this dungeon, with the assistance of the Navigator, they succeeded in stowing the Staff Surgeon, and despite his protests and frantic struggles, shut and fastened the door.

"Now," said the First Lieutenant, "let's go and have some lunch."

"But you aren't going to leave him there, are you?" protested the India-rubber Man.

"Oh, no," was the reply. "The Padre is taking the time. Three minutes we give him." They passed through into the long Wardroom where a score or more of officers were seated at lunch round the table that occupied practically the whole length of the apartment. "Come and sit here next to Thorogood —you travelled up with him, didn't you?"

The officer in question, who was ladling stewed prunes out of a dish on to his plate, grinned at the new-comer.

"Here you are," he said gaily. "Pea soup and boiled pork, my lad," and passed the menu. "Mouldy's vanished since we got onboard. He's probably lunching in his blessed old turret. I had some difficulty in restraining him from trying to put his arms round it when he saw it again. Hullo! Here's Pills. Pills, you look rather warm and your hair wants brushing."

"So would yours if you had been set upon by

Thugs," retorted the Doctor as he took his seat. "Pea soup, please. Ha! There you are, Bunje. Sorry I had to slip it across Number One and the Soldier just now. However, boys will be boys and the least said soonest mended. All is not gold that glitters and a faint heart never won fair lady—pass the salt, please."

"'Fraid we're rather a noisy mess," said the Commander. "You don't get much chance to sit and think beautiful thoughts when Pills is about. Hope you'll get used to it."

The India-rubber Man laughed. "I expect so," he said.

CHAPTER IV

War Babies

"PROPERLY at ease! . . . Class, 'Shun! Left turn! Dismiss!"

The dozen or so of flannel-clad Midshipmen composing the class sprang stiffly to attention, turned forward, and made off briskly in the direction of the hatchway. The India-rubber Man thrust his hands into the pockets of his flannel trousers and strolled across the quarterdeck to where the Officer of the Watch was standing.

"Tweedledum," he said, elevating his nose and sniffing the keen morning air, "I can smell bacon frying somewhere. So could my class: I could see their mouths watering. You might send for the cook and tell him not to do it."

"You're a dirty bully, Bunje, you know," said the Officer of the Watch reprovingly. "Fancy dragging those unhappy children out of their innocent hammocks at this unearthly hour of the morning to flap their legs and arms about and do 'Knees up!' and 'Double-arm-bend-and-stretch!'" He raised a gloved hand and rubbed his blue nose. Ashore a powdering of snow lay on the distant hills; in the

East the sky was flushing with bars of orange and gold athwart the tumbled clouds. An armed drifter, coming in from the open sea, stood out against the light in strong relief. "Here's Mouldy Jakes coming back from Night Patrol—I bet even he isn't as cold as I am."

"Rot!" retorted the Physical Trainer. "Do *you* good, Tweedledum, to hop round a bit on a lovely morning like this!"

"Hop round!" echoed the other. "Hop round!" He looked about him as if searching for a weapon. The dew, which everywhere had frozen during the night, was slowly thawing on the canvas covers of guns and searchlights, dripping from shrouds and yards and aerials.

"Lord alive!" continued the Watchkeeper. "Haven't I been hopping round this perishing quarterdeck since four a.m. keeping the Morning Watch? If Tweedledee doesn't come and relieve me soon I shall die of frostbite and boredom." The India-rubber Man was moving towards the hatchway. "And if you're going along to the bathroom, for pity's sake see there's some hot water left that I can sit and thaw in."

In the meanwhile the Midshipmen had descended to the cabin-flat where their chests occupied most of the available deck space. Flushed and breathless with exercise, the majority proceeded to divest themselves of their flannels and, girt with towels, made off for the bathroom. One, however, flung himself

panting on to his chest, and sprawled partly across his own and partly on his neighbour's.

"I swear this is a bit thick!" he gasped. "I'm not used to this sort of frightfulness." He waved his legs in the air. "I shall get heart disease. Anguis pec—pec—— What's it called?"

"Peccavi," prompted his neighbour, slipping out of his clothes and donning a great-coat in lieu of a dressing-gown. "Otherwise 'The ruddy 'eart-burn.' Just move your greasy head off my till. I want to get at my razor."

"That's the worst of these 'new brooms' "—the victim of heart trouble surveyed his legs anxiously—"I know I've lost a couple of stone since this physical training fiend joined. I don't suppose my people will know me when I go home."

"Well, you aren't likely to be going home for some time to come," said another, a seraphic-faced nudity contemplating his biceps in the small looking-glass that adorned the inside of his chest, "so I shouldn't worry. I say, I'm sweating up a deuce of an arm on me. Shouldn't wonder if I pulled off the Grand Fleet Lightweights next month," he added modestly, "if this sort of thing goes on. I just mention it in case any of you are thinking of putting your names in." He turned from the glass, laughing. "Hullo, Mally, going to have a shave, old thing?"

"Yes, if I can get at my razor—— Oh, Bosh, get off my chest—sprawling all over my gear!"

"I'm in a state of acute physical exhaustion. I

feel tender and giddy. I *know* all this foul exercise is bad for me early in the morning." The speaker sat up and juggled dexterously with a cake of soap, a sponge and a tooth-brush. "I'm getting rather good at this—— My word, look at Mally's shaving outfit. One would think he was a sort of Esau—'stead of only having to shave once a blooming week!"

"Are you going to shave, Mally?" queried a voice across the flat. "Because I'm not sure I shouldn't be better for a bit of a scrape myself. Can I have a rub at your razor after you?"

"You can have it after me if you swear not to skylark with it," replied the owner. "Only, last time I lent it to you, you shaved your beastly leg——"

"Only for practice," admitted the petitioner, advancing with a finger and thumb caressing his chin.

"Well it blunted it, anyhow. Come on, I'm going to the bathroom now."

The Gunroom bathroom was situated in another flat, reached via the aft-deck. Here about this hour an intermittent stream of figures in quaint *négligé* passed and repassed to their toilets. Inside the bathroom itself song and the splashing of water drowned all other sounds. The owner of the enlarged biceps was seated, fakir-wise, cross-legged in one of the shallow, circular baths in a corner, bailing water over himself from an empty cigarette tin.

"Harcourt, old thing," said the shaving enthu-

siast, who had filled a bath and dragged it alongside his friend, "did you mean what you said just now about the boxing show—are you going to put your name down for the Lightweights?"

The fakir stopped crooning a little song to himself and nodded. "Yes, I'm rather keen on it as a matter of fact. Standish saw me scrapping with Green the other night and sent for me afterwards and told me to get fit. I'm going to have a shot at it, I think. Wouldn't you?"

His friend tested the temperature of the water in his bath with his toe, and got in. "Yes, rather," he replied, and hesitated. "I'm going in for it too," he added.

Harcourt rose and reached for his towel. "*Are* you, Billy?" For a moment his eyes travelled over the other's slim form. "What a rag! We may draw each other—anyhow we shall have to scrap if we get into the semi-finals. Billy, I believe you'd bash me!" He towelled himself vigorously.

The other shook his head. "You beat me at Dartmouth. But I'm going to have a jolly good shot at it, cully!" He looked up with his face covered with soap-suds and they laughed into each other's eyes.

* * * * *

Breakfast in the Gunroom was, to employ a transatlantic colloquialism, *some* breakfast.

There was porridge to start with and then a bloater, followed by hashed mutton and cold ham

("for them as likes it," the Messman would say—which meant he pressed it on nobody) and marmalade: perhaps an apple or two to wind up with to the everlasting honour of the Vegetable Products Committee who supplied them gratis to the Fleet. Then pipes and cigarettes appeared from lockers, and the temporarily closed flood-gates of conversation reopened. The Wireless Press Message was discussed and two experts in military strategy proceeded to demonstrate with the aid of two cruet-stands, a tea-spoon, and the Worcester Sauce, the precise condition of affairs on the Western Front. "Mark you," said one generously, "I'm not criticising either Haig or Joffre. But it seems to me that we should have pushed *here*"—and upset the Worcester Sauce.

This mishap to the Loos salient was in process of being righted when the door opened and a short, square-shouldered figure, with a wind-reddened face and eyes of a dark, dangerous blue, entered the mess. He came in stamping his feet and blowing on his hands, calling loudly for breakfast the while. "My, there's a good fug in here," he observed appreciatively, and proceeded to divest himself of a duffle coat, and a pair of night glasses which were slung round his neck in a leather case. He stumped across to the table, dragging his legs in heavy leather sea-boots rather wearily.

"Am I hungry?" he demanded, insinuating himself with some difficulty between the long form and

the table, and sitting down. "Oh, no! Nothing to speak of. Cold? Not a bit: only frozen stiff. Any sleep last night? Rather! Nearly ten minutes. Porridge, please, and pass the brown sugar." The remainder of his messmates appeared disposed to return to strategical discussion. "Did we have any fun last night?" continued the speaker, raising his voice slightly. "Well, nothing to speak of. Only downed a Fritz."

"*Downed* one?" roared the Mess, galvanized suddenly into rapt interest in the new-comer and all his works.

"Yep. We were Outer Night Patrol last night. Me and Mouldy Jakes. He *does* make me smile, that official." A plateful of porridge proceeded to pass rapidly to its last resting place.

"He *might* have taken me," said one of the others wistfully. "You don't belong to his Division or his turret or anything."

"It was my turn. You went last time. But you missed something, I can tell you!"

"What d'you mean," said the Sub over the top of his paper. "Just cough up the details and let your beastly breakfast wait."

The Night Patroller extracted the backbone from a bloater with swift dexterity. "Well," he continued, "it was very dark last night and foggy in patches: rum night. Very little wind and no sea. We were right outside and the Engineer sent up to say he thought there was something foul of the propeller.

So we stopped and investigated with a boathook. There was a lot of weed and stuff fouling us. We were playing about with it *mit* boathook for nearly a quarter-of-an-hour, and suddenly old Mouldy Jakes put up his head and sniffed about a bit and muttered 'Baccy.'"

"He's got a nose like a hawk," said the Midshipman of that officer's Division with a tinge of pride in his voice.

The Mess perforce had to possess its soul in patience while the raconteur swiftly disposed of the bloater.

"So I sniffed too, and I could smell it quite plain. We were lying stern to the wind; 'sides it wasn't decent baccy like ours, but sort of Scorp stuff, so we knew it wasn't one of our fellows smoking. Hashed mutton, please; and another cup of coffee. It was pitch dark and for a moment we couldn't see a thing. Then, suddenly, right on top of us came a submarine. She was on the surface and there was a fellow on the conning tower and a couple of figures aft. She must have been smelling about on the surface having a smoke and recharging her batteries."

The remainder of the Gunroom had crowded round the speaker, some kneeling on the form with their elbows among the débris of breakfast, others sat on the edge of the table hugging their knees.

"My word, Matt," said one, his eyes dancing, "I bet you got cold feet."

"Cold feet!" snorted the hero of the moment. "There wasn't time for cold feet. It was too sudden. They just grazed past us, going very slow, and there was a devil of a bobbery. I fancy they thought they were properly in the *consommé*. A trap or something. Anyhow the two braves aft lost their heads and jumped overboard, and the bird in the conning tower disappeared like a Jack-in-the-box—properly rattled."

"What price old Mouldy?" asked the listeners. "Utterly unmoved, I suppose! Lord, I'd love to have seen him!"

"Oh, bored stiff by the whole performance, of course. Still he did make one wild leap for the gun and got off a round at point-blank range. Hit her just below the conning tower. She must have been in diving trim, because she went down like a stone, bubbling like an empty soda-water bottle."

"What about the Huns in the water?" demanded the enthralled Clerk.

"We could only find one. The other must have got mixed up with the submarine's propeller. The one we picked up was nearly done and awfully surprised because we gave him dry clothes and hot drinks and a smoke, and didn't spit in his eye or anything of that sort. Said their officers always told them we illtreated our prisoners. Aren't they Nature's little Nobs?"

There was a little silence, each one busy with

his own thoughts. Finally one broke the silence, voicing the opinion of the rest:

"Well," he ejaculated, "some people have all the blinking luck. I've done about twenty night patrols since I've been up here and never seen anything 'cept a porpoise."

The Night Patroller lit a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke with the air of a man who had earned it. "You were at Suvla Bay and the landing from the *River Clyde*," he retorted. "You can't have *every* ruddy thing in life."

* * * * *

A fine day in Ultima Thule—they were rare—was an occasion for thankfulness and rejoicing. Directly after luncheon the members of Gunroom and Wardroom made their way on deck to bask in the sun and smoke contemplative post-prandial pipes in the lee of the after superstructure. Forward, in amidships, the band was playing a slow waltz and fifty or so couples from among the ship's company were solemnly revolving to the music with expressions of melancholy enjoyment peculiar to such exercise.

"It's make-and-mend this afternoon," said the Senior Midshipman, tilting his cap over his eyes and lazily watching the antics of a gull volplaning against the light wind. He sat on the deck with his back against the superstructure and his hands clasped round his knees.

"It's a topping day, too," added Malison from

his vantage astride the coir-hawser reel. "Too good to waste onboard. The footer ground's bagged—let's have a picnic in one of the cutters. Have tea ashore, an' fry bangers over a fire."

The project found favour generally. "We might ask one or two of the Wardroom," suggested Harcourt. "Some of the cheery ones: Standish and Thorogood and the Doc, say."

"*And* old Jakes," supplemented the Midshipman of that officer's Division jealously. "I'd like to ask him. He loves picnics."

Mouldy Jakes was included in the invitation list by general consent. His half-humorous, resigned air of chronic boredom had a peculiar attraction for all the Midshipmen; in the case of the Midshipmen of his turret it amounted to idolatry.

"Go an' ask 'em, Harcourt," said the Senior Midshipman. "You're the Blue-eyed Boy with the Wardroom. I'll go and tackle the Commander for the cutter."

"Then Bosh and I will go and ginger-up the Messman," said another, "and get a basket packed. What shall we have for tea?"

"Sloe-gin," promptly responded a tall, pale Midshipman with a slightly freckled nose and sandy hair. "Sloe-gin and bangers.* And get strawberry jam: see the Messman doesn't try and palm off any of his beastly gooseberry stuff like he did last time.

* Tinned sausages. A delicacy peculiar to Gunrooms of the Fleet.

What about bacon and eggs, and some tins of cocoa and milk, and a cake and some sardines——"

"Wonk," interrupted the caterer, "we're only going to have tea ashore. We aren't going to camp out for the week-end."

"I tell you what," said Mouldy Jake's patron, "I'll bring my line and we'll catch pollack and fry *them* for tea too."

"Well, I'm going to shift," said Malison, and the Committee of Supply broke up and passed down below.

Half an hour later the cutter, manned and provisioned, with the skiff in tow, hoisted her foresail and sheered off from the after gangway. The India-rubber Man, as Senior Officer of the expedition, took the helm and banished the Young Doctor into the bows, where, to judge by the ecstatic shouts of merriment that floated aft, his peculiar form of wit was much appreciated. Thorogood, at the main sheet, with an old deer-stalker on his head and a pipe in his mouth, led the chorus in the sternsheets. Mouldy Jakes had usurped the skiff, and having satisfied himself that he was required to take no further part in the navigation of the expedition, made himself comfortable in the bottom of the boat and blinked at the sky through puffs of smoke from his pipe.

He was followed into this voluntary exile by the Midshipman of his Division, one Morton, who sat in the bows contemplating him affectionately.

Precisely what it was that inspired this appar-

ently one-sided attachment was never very apparent. The almost passionate loyalty and affections of youth are hardy plants, thriving abundantly on the scantiest soil.

For a while only the drowsy swish of the water past the bottom of the boat, and snatches of merriment or song drifting aft from the cutter, broke the silence in the skiff. Then Mouldy Jakes's companion apparently tired of this silent communion.

"Sir," he said, "would you like to fish?"

"No," said Mouldy Jakes.

His host proceeded to unwind his line. "Do you mind if I do?" he enquired.

"No," was the reply.

The Midshipman watched his line in silence for a little while. "Do you think you sank that submarine last night?" he asked presently.

Mouldy Jakes closed his eyes and gave a grunt with an affirmative intonation.

"It must have been a topping show. Weren't you awfully bucked, sir?"

Another grunt.

"I suppose you didn't get a wink of sleep all night?"

A vague confirmatory noise.

"You must be jolly tired, sir. Wouldn't you like to sleep a bit now, sir?"

"Yes."

"Right ho, sir. You can carry on and have a jolly good caulk. I'm going to fish, and I'll call

you when we get to the island where we're going to land. . . . Is your head quite comfortable?"

Silence reigned in the skiff.

The cutter had passed beyond the outskirts of the Fleet, and the decorum required of the occupants of a Service boat in such surroundings no longer ruled their behaviour. They sang and shouted for sheer joy of bellowing, full-lunged, across the untrammelled water. No one whose life is not spent in the narrow confines of a man-of-war, walking paths sternly ruled by Naval Discipline, can realise the intoxicating effect of such an emancipation. The mysterious workings of the Midshipman-mind found full play on these occasions, as they tumbled about in the bottom of the boat in the unfettered enjoyment of a whole-hearted "scrap." If you have ever seen young foxes at play, buffeting each other, yelping with simulated anguish, nuzzling endearments half savage and half in play, you have an idea of the bottom of a cutter full of Midshipmen proceeding on a picnic. It was an embodiment of youth triumphant, shouting with laughter at the Jest of Life.

"Where shall we go?" asked Standish, smiling, during a lull when the crew sat panting and flushed with exertion, grinning at each other over the tops of the thwarts.

"Any blooming where," shouted Thorogood. "As long as it is out of sight of the Fleet. I feel I've seen enough of the Silent Navy for an hour or two." Then raising his voice he chanted:

"Put me upon an island where the girls are few . . ."

"Right," retorted the India-rubber Man. "We'll go round this little headland. Ready about! Check the fore sheet! Come aft out of the bows, Pills, you clown, unless you want us to miss stays."

"I don't want to go to an island," cried the Surgeon plaintively, "where the girls are few." He surveyed the heather-crowned islets surrounding them on all sides, the lonely haunts of cormorants and black-backed gulls. "I'm all for houris and sirens and whatnots——"

The foresail swung across and knocked him into the bottom of the boat.

"You frail Ulysses!" exclaimed Thorogood, as they set sail on the new course. "You aren't to be trusted in these populous parts. We must lash you to the mast!"

"And stop his ears with cotton-wool," said a Midshipman whose acquaintance with the classics was still a recent, if sketchy acquisition.

A party set off into the bows to put the proposal into immediate execution, but the imminence of land and a shout from the helmsman arrested them in their purpose:

"Down foresail. Top up mainsail!" The cutter, with the skiff towing peacefully astern, glided into a little bay where miniature cliffs, some twenty feet in height, rose from a narrow shale-strewn beach. The anchor plashed overboard.

"Here we are, here we are, here we are again!" carolled the Surgeon lustily. "Come alongside, skiff! The landing of the Lancashire Fusiliers is about to commence under a withering fire!"

A letter received that morning from a soldier brother who had taken part in that epic of human gallantry had apparently inspired the Young Doctor. He pointed ahead with a dramatic gesture at the cliffs. "Yonder are the Turks! See, they fly, they fly!" A pair of agitated cormorants, sunning themselves on the rocks, flew seaward with outstretched necks. "Lead on, brave lads, and I will follow!"

The skiff came bumping alongside, and Mouldy Jakes, galvanized into wakefulness by the confusion and laughter, found himself inextricably entangled in the fishing-line, holding a kettle that someone had thrust upon him in one hand and a frying-pan in the other. Half a dozen partly clad forms, followed by the Doctor, flung themselves headlong into the skiff and made for the shore. The bows grated on the shingle and they sprang out.

"For drill purposes only," explained the Surgeon breathlessly, "we are Turks!" Under his direction they proceeded to collect pebbles. "A withering volley will accordingly be opened on the Lancashire Fusiliers."

Despite a heavy fire of pebbles, the landing was ultimately effected; the invaders abandoned their trousers and floundered gallantly through the bullet-torn shallows. Ensued a complete rout of the Turks,

who were pursued inland across the heather with triumphant shouts and the corpse of a seagull, found on the beach, hurled after them from the point of a piece of driftwood.

The evicted snipers eventually returned with their caps full of plovers' eggs, to find a fire of bleached twigs blazing and sausages frizzling in the frying-pan. They were handed mugs of hot tea.

In the phraseology of chroniclers of Sunday-school treats, "ample justice was done to the varied repast." Then it was discovered that the tide was falling, and a hasty re-embarkation followed.

Sails were hoisted, the anchor weighed, and the cutter, with the empty skiff in tow, headed for the West, where the sun was already setting in a great glory of gold.

The brief warmth of a Northern spring day had passed, and, as they rounded the promontory and the Fleet hove in sight once more, duffle coats and mufflers were donned and a bottle of sloe-gin uncorked.

"Mug-up!" cried the Sub. "Mug-up, and let's get 'appy and chatty." They crowded together in the stern-sheets for warmth, and presently Thorogood started "John Brown's Body Lies A-mouldering in the Grave," without which no properly conducted picnic can come to a fitting conclusion. The purple shadows deepened in the far-off valleys ashore, and anon stole out across the water, enfolding

the anchored Fleet into the bosom of another night of a thousand vigils.

It was dusk when they reached the outlying cruisers, and nearly dark when the first ship in the Battle Fleet hailed them. Then hail answered hail as one Battleship after another rose towering above them into the darkling sky, and one by one passed into silence astern.

Silence also had fallen on the singers. Seen thus from an open boat under the lowering wings of night, there was something awe-inspiring—even to these who lived onboard them—in the stupendous fighting outlines limned against the last of the light. Complete darkness reigned on board, but once a dog barked, and the strains of an accordion drifted across the water as reminders that each of these menacing mysteries was the habitation of their fellow-men. A tiny pin-point of light winked from a yard-arm near by to another pin-point in the Cruiser line: Somebody was answering an invitation to dinner at 7.45 p.m., with many thanks; then, reminder of sterner things, a searchlight leaped out spluttering over their heads, and swept to and fro across the sky like the paint-brush of a giant.

A half-drowsy Midshipman in the bows of the cutter watched the message of hospitality blinking through space; he consulted the luminous dial on his wrist. "H'm," he observed to his companion, "I thought it was getting on for dinner-time. Funny how quickly one gets hungry again."

A hail challenged them from the darkness, and a towering outline loomed familiarly ahead.

"Aye, aye!" shouted the voice of the India-rubber Man from the stern, adding in lower tones, "Boat-hook up forward. Fore halliards in hand. . . ."

"Home again!" said another voice in the darkness. "And so the long day wears on. . . ."

* * * * *

Dinner in the Gunroom was over. One by one the occupants became engrossed in their wonted evening occupations and amusements.

"Mordaunt," said the sandy-haired Midshipman, rising and opening the gramophone, "would you like to hear George Robey?"

The officer addressed, who was sitting at the table apparently in the throes of literary composition, raised his head. "No," he replied, "I wouldn't; I'm writing a letter. 'Sides I've heard that record at least seven hundred and eighty-one times already."

"Can't help it," retorted the musical enthusiast, winding the handle of the instrument. "*I* think he's perfectly priceless!" He set the needle, stepped back a pace and stood beaming appreciatively into the vociferous trumpet while the song blared forth.

"Reminds me," said Harcourt, laying down a novel and rising from the corner of the settee where he had curled himself, "I must write to my young sister for her birthday. Lend me a bit of your notepaper, Billy."

His friend complied with the request without raising his eyes. "How d'you spell 'afford'?" he enquired.

"Two f's," replied Harcourt. "'Least I think so. Can I have a dip at your ink?"

"I thought it was two, but it doesn't look right, somehow." The two pens scratched in unison.

Matthews, the Midshipman of the previous Night Patrol, had stretched himself on an adjacent settee and fallen asleep immediately after dinner.

Lettigne, otherwise known as "Bosh," amused himself by juggling with a banana, two oranges and a walnut, relics of his dessert. His performance was being lazily watched by the Sub from the depths of the arm-chair which he had drawn as near to the glowing stove as the heat would allow. It presently attracted the notice of two other Midshipmen who had finished a game of picquet and were casting about them for a fresh distraction. This conversion of edible objects into juggling paraphernalia presently moved one to protest.

"Why don't you eat that banana, Bosh, instead of chucking it about?" he enquired.

"'Cause I can't," said the exponent of leger-demain.

"Why not?" queried the other.

"Too full already," was the graceful response. "I'm just waiting—waiting till the clouds roll by, so to speak."

The two interlocutors eyed each other speculatively.

"Did you have any dessert?" asked one.

"No," was the sorrowful reply. "My extra-bill's up."

Thereupon they rose together and fell straightway upon the juggler. An equal division of the spoil was made while they sat upon his prostrate form, and eaten to the accompaniment of searching prods into their victim's anatomy.

"Bosh, you ought to be jolly grateful to us, really. You'd probably have appendicitis if we let you eat all this—phew! Mally, just feel here. . . . Isn't he a hog! . . ."

"Just like a blooming drum," replied the other, prodding judicially.

Over their heads the tireless voice of the gramophone trumpeted forth its song. The Sub who had kept the Middle Watch the night before, slept the sleep of the tired just. The door opened and a Junior Midshipman entered hot-foot. "Letters," he shouted. "Any letters to be censored? The mail's closing to-morrow morning."

"Yes," replied the two correspondents at the table, simultaneously bringing their letters to a close.

"Hurry up, then," said the messenger. "The Padre's waiting to censor them. He sent me along to see if there were any more."

Mordaunt folded his letter and placed it in an

envelope. "Got a stamp, Harcourt? I've run out." He extended a penny.

Harcourt looked up, pen in mouth, thumping his wet sheet with the blotting paper. "In my locker—I'll get you one in a second."

"Oh, do buck up," wailed the messenger. "I want to turn in, an' the Padre's waiting."

"*All* right," retorted Harcourt. He rose to his feet. "I forgot: little boys lose their roses if they don't get to bed early. Billy, shove that letter in an envelope for me, to save time, while I get the stamp." His friend complied with the request and picked up his pen to address his own epistle. As he did so the prostrate juggler, with a sudden, spasmodic recrudescence of energy, flung his two assailants off him and struggled to a sitting position. They were on him again like wolves, but as they bore him prostrate to the deck he clutched wildly at a corner of the table-cloth.

The next moment the conflict was inextricably involved with the table-cloth, letters, note-paper, envelopes and ink descending upon the combatants in a cascade.

"You clumsy owls," roared Harcourt, returning from his locker. "Now, where's my letter? . . ." He searched among the débris.

"I say, do buck up," wailed the sleepy voice on the threshold.

"Buck up?" echoed Harcourt. "Buck up! How the devil can I buck up—ah, here we are." He

picked up an envelope, glanced carelessly under the still open flap and sat down to address it. "Got yours, Billy? Here's the stamp."

"Yes," replied the other, grovelling in the darkness under the table. "This is it." He reappeared with a letter in his hand.

"The Padre——" again began the impatient envoy.

"All right—all right!" Mordaunt hurriedly affixed the stamp and addressed the envelope without looking at the contents. "Here you are," he said, holding it out. The messenger departed hastily.

The bang of the door awoke the Sub.

"Now, then," he said. "Enough of this. Switch off that cursed gramophone. Get up off the deck. Mop that ink up and square off the table-cloth. Knock off scrapping, you three hooligans."

The hooligans obeyed reluctantly, and sat panting and dishevelled on the settee. By degrees the Mess resumed its tranquillity.

Harcourt stretched his slim form and yawned sleepily. "I'm going to turn in now. And to-morrow know all men that I start training."

"That's right," said Lettigne, still panting and adjusting his disordered garments. "Nothing like being really fit—ready to go anywhere an' do anything—that's my motto." He rang the bell and ordered a bottle of ginger beer.

CHAPTER V

Uncle Bill

SIR WILLIAM THOROGOOD rose from the table on which lay a confusion of papers, drawings and charts. He walked across the cabin to the tiled fireplace, selected a cigar from his case, and lit it with precise care.

"You're right," he said. "You've put your finger on the weak spot. No one in Whitehall saw it, and they're seamen. I didn't see it, and—and I'm called a scientist." He made an imperceptible inclination of his head towards his companion as if to convey a compliment.

The other occupant of the broad cabin smiled a little grimly. "It's a question of actual experience," he said. "Experience of this particular form of warfare, and the means of meeting it hitherto at our disposal."

He pencilled some figures on a piece of paper and studied them with knitted brows.

"It's a pity," he said presently. "You're on the brink of the most stupendous discovery of our day. The submarine was a wonderful invention, and there's no limit to the possibilities of its development—or abuse. Until an effective counter can be devised it

remains a very terrible menace to civilisation in the hands of an unscrupulous belligerent."

Sir William smoked in silence. His thin, aristocratic face, and his level grey eyes, had a look of fatigue. "I was particularly glad to avail myself of your invitation," he said. "I wanted practical experience of the conditions in the North Sea—weather and visibility. And, later on, in the North Atlantic. I'm going over to Ireland next month." His tired eyes followed the blue smoke curling upwards. "Of course, the experiments we tried down South answered all right for short distances. That's what rather deceived us. They were harbour trials, no more. We want something more exhaustive than that. And, as you say, there's the pull of the tides to consider. . . . Confound the tide!"

His companion smiled. "That's what Canute said. Or words to that effect. But it didn't help matters much."

"Quite," replied Sir William dryly. "Well, I should like to take a patrol boat and one of our submarines for a day or two and test that new theory—to-morrow if I may. And—while I think of it—I have promised a young nephew of mine to dine with him to-night in his ship, if it in no way inconveniences you?"

The other nodded, and, reaching out his hand, pressed the button of an electric bell beside his desk.

* * * * *

It was the hour preceding dinner, and the majority

of the members of the Wardroom had congregated in the ante-room to discuss sherry and the day's affairs before descending to their cabins to change. It was a cheerful gathering, as the hour and the place betokened, and the usual mild chaff flowed to and fro in its myteriously appointed channels.

In Naval communities, as in most others where men are segregated from wider intercourse by a common mode of life and purpose, each one occupies the place designed for him by Destiny for the smooth working of the whole. These types are peculiar to no trade or profession. A gathering of farmers or elders of the Church, or even Christy Minstrels, would, if thrown together for a sufficient period of time, and utterly dependent on one another for daily intercourse, fall into the places allotted to each by temperament and heredity. Each little community would own a wit and a butt; the sentimentalist and the cynic. The churl by nature would appear through some veneer of manner, if only to bring into relief the finer qualities of his fellows; lastly, and most surely, one other would jingle a merciful cap and bells, and mingle motley with the rest.

The First Lieutenant had just come down from the upper-deck, and stood warming his hands by the fire. Big-boned, blue-eyed, health and vitality seemed to radiate from his kindly, forceful personality. Of all the officers on board "Jimmy the One" was, with perhaps the exception of the Captain, most beloved

by the men. A seaman to the fingertips, slow to wrath and clean of speech, he had the knack of getting the last ounce out of tired men without driving or raising his voice. Working cables on the forecastle in the cold and snowy darkness, when men's faculties grow torpid with cold, and their safety among the grinding cables depends more upon the alert supervision of the First Lieutenant than the mere instinct for self-preservation, "Jimmy the One" was credited with powers allied to those of the high Gods. "'Tween decks," where the comfort and cleanliness of close on eleven hundred men was mainly his affair, they abused, loved and feared him with whole-hearted affection. His large football-damaged nose smelt out dirt as a Zulu witch-doctor smells out magic. The majority of the vast ship's company—seamen ratings, at all events—he knew by name. He also presided over certain of the lower-deck amusements, and, at the bi-weekly cinema shows, studied their tastes in the matter of Charlie Chaplin and the Wild West with the discrimination of a lover choosing flowers for his mistress.

His own personal amusements were few. He admitted possessing three books which he read and re-read in rotation: "Peter Simple," "Alice in Wonderland," and a more recent discovery, Owen Wister's "Virginian." A widowed mother in a Yorkshire dower house was the only relative he was ever heard to refer to, and for her benefit every Sunday afternoon he sat down for an hour, as he had since

school-days, and wrote a boyish, detailed chronicle of his doings during the past week.

The two watch-keeping Lieutenants sat one on each arm of the deep-seated chesterfield opposite the fire. They were the Inseparables of the Mess, knit together in that curious blend of antagonistic and sympathetic traits of character which binds young men in an austere affection passing the love of woman. One was short and stout, the other tall and lean; an illustration in the First Lieutenant's edition of "Alice in Wonderland" supplied them with their nicknames, which they accepted from the first without criticism or demur.

The Fleet Surgeon sat between them cleaning a pipe with a collection of seagull's feather gathered for the purpose on the golf links ashore. He was thin, a grey-haired, silent man. His face, in repose, was that of a deliberate thinker whose thoughts had not led him to an entirely happy goal. Yet his smile when amused had a quality of gratitude to the jester, not altogether without pathos. He had a slightly cynical demeanour, a bitter tongue, and a curiously sympathetic, almost tender manner with the sick. He was professedly a fierce woman-hater, and when ashore passed children quickly with averted eyes.

Of a different type was the Paymaster, sunny as a schoolboy, irresponsible in leisure hours as the youngest member of the Mess. Perhaps there had been a time when he had not found life an altogether laughing matter. He had an invalid wife; his means

were small, and most of his life had been spent at sea. But misfortune seemed to have but tossed a challenge to his unquenchable optimism and faith in the mercy of God. He had picked up the gage with a smile, flung it back with a laugh, and with drawn blade joined the gallant band of those who strive eternally to defend the beleaguered Citadel of Human Happiness.

Others came and went among the gathering: the Engineer Commander, fiercely bearded and moustached, who cherished an inexplicable belief that a studied soldierly accent and bearing helped him in his path through life. The Major, clean-shaven and philosophic; the Gunnery Lieutenant, preoccupied with his vast responsibilities, a seaman-scientist with a reputation in the football field. The Torpedo Lieutenant, quiet, gentle-mannered, fastidious in his dress and not given to overmuch speech. The Engineer-Lieutenant, whose outlook on life alternated between moods of fierce hilarity and brooding melancholy, according to the tenour of a correspondence with a distracting Red Cross nursing sister exposed to the perils of caring for good-looking military officers in the plains of Flanders. Lastly, the Captain of Marines; he was the musician of the Mess, much in demand at sing-songs; editor, moreover, of the Ward-room magazine, a periodical whose humour was of a turn mercifully obscure to maiden aunts. A first-class cricketer and racquet-player, a student of human nature with a tolerance for the failings of others that

suggested a strain of Latin blood, and a Marine with an almost passionate pride in the great traditions of his Corps.

Such were among the occupants of the ante-room when Thorogood entered the crowded room and crossed over to the door leading to the Wardroom where the Marine waiters were laying the table.

"Tell the Messman I've got a guest to dinner," said Thorogood to the Corporal of the Wardroom servants.

The Young Doctor, who was leaning against the overmantel of the stove warming himself, crossed over to Thorogood with an expression of portentous solemnity on his face.

"James," he said, and laid a hand on the other's shoulder, "before you get busy on the wassail-bowl, my lad, I should like to remind you that the boat's crew will commence training for the Regatta at 7 a.m. to-morrow. No fat-heads wanted. Enough said."

The Gunnery Lieutenant looked up from a game of draughts with Double-O Gerrard, the Assistant Paymaster. "Who've you got dining with you, Jimmy?" he asked. The introduction of "new blood" into a Mess, even for the evening, is generally a matter of interest to the inmates.

"An old uncle of mine," was the reply. "He signalled from the Flagship that he was coming to dinner. I don't know what he's doing up here."

Mouldy Jakes, who was sitting on an arm of the

sofa watching the game of draughts, looked across at Thorogood.

"Sir William?" he asked. "Is that man of mystery up here? What's he up to?"

"Don't know," replied Thorogood. "Dirty work, I suppose."

The Young Doctor assumed an expression of rapture. "What!" he cried, "my old college chum Sir William!" Then with a swift change of mimicry he bent into a senile pose with nodding head and shaking fingers, mumbling at his lips:

"Ah! Ah!" he wheezed, "how time flies! I mind the day when he and I were lads together—hee-hee—brave lads . . . Eton and Christ Church together——" He broke off into a decrepit chuckle.

"Dry up, Pills, you ass," cried the Torpedo Lieutenant, laughing. "You aren't a bit funny—in fact, I'm not sure you aren't rather bad form."

"Bad form?" echoed the First Lieutenant. "Let us see now. What's the penalty for bad form, Pay? I've forgotten."

"To be devoured by lions," said the Paymaster calmly, with an eye on the sofa where Garm, the bull-terrier, sprawled as usual.

"That's right," said the First Lieutenant, "so it is: devoured of lions."

The next moment the Doctor was tripped up into the depths of the sofa, the bull-terrier, thus rudely awakened from slumber, dumped on top of him, and

his struggles stifled by the bodies of the Paymaster and First Lieutenant. "Eat him, Garm—Hi! good beastie! Chew his nose, lick his collar . . . !"

The great bull-terrier, accustomed to being the instrument of such summary execution, entered into the game with zest, and sprawling across the Surgeon's chest, with one massive paw on his face, nuzzled and slavered in an abandonment of affectionate gusto.

"Oh!—oh!—oh!—pah!—phew!" The victim writhed and spluttered protests. "Dry up—Garm, you great donkey! Piff!—you're—smothering—me—beast! Ugh! my collar—clean—no offence—Jimmy, I 'pologise—lemme get up . . . Faugh!"

In the midst of the uproar the door opened and the Midshipman of the Watch appeared.

"Mr. Thorogood, sir," he called. "Someone to see you."

The group on the sofa broke up. The Surgeon sat up panting and wiping his face. The dog jumped to the deck and accompanied Thorogood across to the door, wagging a friendly tail.

Sir William Thorogood, hat in hand, with his cloak over his arm, entered the ante-room. His eyeglass fell from his eye.

"Hullo, Uncle Bill," exclaimed his nephew. "You're early—nice and early—we've just started training for the Regatta and we're straffing the coxswain by way of a start! Er—Staff Surgeon Tucker, Sir William Thorogood."

The Surgeon advanced with a rather embarrassed grin and shook hands with the eminent scientist.

"I fancy I knew your father once," said the latter smiling. "He held the chair of Comparative Anatomy—we were at college together—bless me!—a good many years ago now." He stood smiling down at Pills from his lean height.

The Mess chortled at the Surgeon's discomfiture. Thorogood turned to the Commander who had just then entered. "This is Commander Hornby," he said, and introduced the two men. "There's Mouldy—you remember him?" Mouldy Jakes came over and shook hands gravely. "And this is the rest of the Mess." He included the remainder with a wave of his hand, and Sir William acknowledged the informal general introduction with the grave, smiling self-possession of the perfectly bred Englishman.

"Now," said his nephew, "what about a cocktail, Uncle Bill?"

"Yes," said Mouldy Jakes, sharing with his friend the responsibility of entertaining this eminent guest. "We've got rather a good brand—fizzy ones. Do you a power of good, sir!"

Sir William laughed. "Thank you," he said, "but fizzy cocktails and I came to the parting of the ways more years ago than I care to remember. Perhaps I may be allowed to join you in a glass of sherry . . . ?"

"Rather," said his host, and gave the order.

"Well, Uncle Bill," he said, "what brings you up to Ultima Thule and on board the Flagship?"

The Scientist helped himself to a biscuit from the tray on a little table near the door. "I'm staying with—with an old friend for a few days, for a change of air," he said. He took the proffered glass of sherry and sipped it appreciatively. "May I congratulate you on your excellent sherry?"

"It's not bad," said Mouldy Jakes. "I'm the wine caterer," he added modestly.

At this juncture dinner was announced and they passed through into the long Wardroom.

Shaded electric lights hung down above the table that traversed the length of the Mess. A number of ornamental pieces of silver and trophies adorned the centre of the table and winked and glistened against the dark mahogany. Slips of white napery ran down on either side, on which the glasses, silver and cutlery lay. They took their places, the presidential hammer tapped, and the Chaplain, rising, offered brief thanks. Immediately after a buzz of conversation broke out generally.

Sir William, on the right of the President, indicated the glittering trophies. "I see you keep your plate on board," he said, smiling, "even in war."

The Commander laughed. "Well," he said, "all these things we actually won ourselves. There's a lot more stuff—the things that belong to the ship itself, one commission as much as another, and those we landed. Then, if we get sunk, successive ships

bearing our name will carry them, you see . . . yes, half a glass, please. But all you see here we won at battle practice just before the war, boat-racing and so on. . . . Incidentally we hope to win the Squadron Regatta this year. That big one over there was from the passengers of a burning ship we rescued. . . . If we're sunk they may as well go down with us; at least, that's how we look at it. It is only in keeping with our motto, after all."

He pushed across a silver menu-holder, bearing the ship's crest and motto on a scroll beneath it. The guest picked it up and examined it. "What we hold we hold," he read. "Yes, I see. It's not a bad interpretation."

Sir William looked round the table at the laughing, animated faces—many of them little more than boys seen through the long perspective of his own years.

The Chaplain was having "his leg hauled." The joke was obscure, and concerned an episode of bygone days which appeared to be within the intimate recollection of at least half the number seated round the table.

The other half were demanding enlightenment, and in the laughter and friendly mischief on certain faces Sir William read an affectionate, mysterious freemasonry apparently shared by all.

For a moment he leaned back, contemplating in imagination the scores of great ships surrounding them on all sides, invisible in the night: in each

Wardroom there was doubtless a similar cheerful gathering beneath the shaded electric lights. Musing thus, glancing from face to face, and listening, half uncomprehending, to the laughing jargon, he glimpsed for an instant the indefinable Spirit of the Fleet. Each of these communities, separated by steel and darkness from the other, shared it. It stretched back into a past of unforgotten memories, linking one and all in a brotherhood that compassed the waters of the earth, and bore their traditions with unfailing hands across the hazard of the future.

The meal drew to a close and the decanters went slowly round. Mouldy Jakes, from his seat opposite the President, was attempting to catch Sir William's eye. His nephew intercepted and interpreted the gesticulations. "Mouldy's recommending the Madeira, Uncle Bill," said his nephew; "he evidently feels that his reputation as wine caterer is at stake after your comments on the sherry!"

Sir William laughed and filled his glass accordingly.

Obedient to a signal conveyed to the Bandmaster by a Marine waiter, the band in the flat outside came suddenly to a stop.

Down came the President's hammer, and the name of the King preceded the raising of glasses. Then the violins outside resumed their whimpering melody; coffee followed a second circulation of the decanters, and presently the smoke of cigars and

cigarettes began to eddy across the polished mahogany.

A few minutes later the Master-at-Arms entered the Wardroom, and stepping up to the Commander's chair, reported something in a low voice. The Commander turned sideways to the guest of the evening. "Will you excuse me if I leave you?" he said. "I have to go the rounds." And rising from the table left a gap at Sir William's side. Intimate conversation between uncle and nephew, hitherto impracticable, was now possible.

"How's Cecily, Uncle Bill?" asked James. "Which reminds me," he added, "that I met Armitage when I was coming back from leave."

Sir William removed his cigar and contemplated the pale ash with inscrutable eyes.

"I heard from Armitage," he replied. "Did you by any chance meet his companion on the journey up?"

James shook his head. "No, I only saw Armitage for a moment, and that was in the darkness at the rail-head. But you haven't told me how Cecily is."

"She wants to go to America," replied his uncle.

"America!" echoed his nephew. "Why?"

"To stay with an old school friend. It seems she wants to go over for a Newport season."

"But," said James and paused, "are you going to let her go, Uncle Bill?"

"She says she's going," was her guardian's reply.

James smoked in silence for a moment.

"But Newport," he said. "Where on earth did Cecily develop a taste for that sort of life?"

"Read about it in a book, I fancy," said Sir William.

"But it isn't the sort of thing I can imagine appealing to Cecily in the least," objected her cousin. "I know what Cecily likes—pottering about in old tweeds with a dog, sketching and fishing. I can't see her at Bailey's Beach surf-bathing with millionaires in the family diamonds. Besides, what about her war work—her Hospital Supply Depot?"

Sir William made no answer.

"Is she unhappy about anything?" pursued James. "Has Armitage been making love to her? I know he used to follow her about like a sick dog, but I didn't know it upset her."

Sir William smiled. "No," he said, "I shouldn't have said so either. But I don't claim any profound insight into the feminine mind. All I know is that she looks rather pale, and she has grown uncommonly quiet. At times she has restless moods of rather forced gaiety. But the reason for it all, I'm afraid, is beyond me."

"Do you remember d'Auvergne?" asked his nephew suddenly. "Podgie d'Auvergne. He spent a summer leave with us once, and he used to come up to town a good deal from Whale Island when he was there. Do you think Cecily is in love with him?"

"Bless me," said Sir William helplessly, "I don't know. I never remember her saying so. Do you think that would account for—for her present mood? Women are such curious beings——"

"I know he's fearfully gone on her," said James, "but he lost a foot early in the war. He hasn't been near her since."

"Why not?" asked the Scientist vaguely.

"Oh, because—because he's fearfully sensitive about it. And he's frightfully in love with her. You see, a thing like that tells enormously when a fellow's in love."

"Does it?" enquired Sir William. "Well, granted that your theory is correct, I fail to see what I am to do. I can't kidnap this young man and carry him to my house like the alien visitor you once brought to disturb my peaceful slumbers."

"Ah," said James, "Crabpots!" He chuckled retrospectively.

"If he has really developed a neurotic view of his injury, as you imply," continued the older man, "it's no use my inviting him, because he would only refuse to come."

"You'll have to work it somehow," replied his nephew. "Sea voyages aren't safe enough just now —we'd never forgive ourselves if we let Cecily go and anything happened to her—or Podgie either," he added grimly.

By twos and threes the members of the Mess had risen from the table and drifted into the ante-

room to play bridge, or to their cabins, there to write letters, read, or occupy themselves in wood-carving and kindred pursuits. At a small table in the corner of the long Mess the officers of the Second Dog Watch had finished a belated meal, and were yarning in low voices over their port.

James and his uncle alone remained seated at the long table.

"Well," said the former, "let's move on, Uncle Bill. Would you like a rubber of bridge?"

"I can play bridge in London," replied his guest, rising. "No, Jim, I think I'd like to take this opportunity of paying a visit to the Gunroom. When you are my age you'll find a peculiar fascination about youth and its affairs. Do you think they'd object to my intrusion?"

"They'd be awfully bucked," said James. "Come along." As they passed out of the door they met the Marine postman entering with his arms full of letters and papers. "Hullo," he continued, "here's the mail—you'll see a Gunroom devouring its letters: rather like a visit to the Zoo about feeding-time!"

They came to the door of the Gunroom, and James, opening it, motioned his guest to enter. One end of the table resembled a bee swarm: a babel of voices sounded as those nearest the pile of letters shouted the names of the addressees and tossed the missives back over their heads.

The two men stood smiling and unobserved in the doorway until the distribution was complete. Then

they were seen, and the Sub advanced to extend the hospitality of his realm.

"Kedgeree," said James, "this is my uncle. He's getting bored with the Wardroom and I've brought him along here." The Sub laughingly shook hands, and the inmates in his immediate vicinity gathered round with the polite air of a community of whom something startling was expected.

"Won't you sit down, sir?" asked one, drawing forward the battered wicker arm-chair. "It's all right as long as you don't lean back—but if you do we must prop it against the table." He suited the action to the words, and the guest sat down rather gingerly.

"Won't you have something to drink?" queried Kedgeree. "Whisky and soda or something?"

Sir William smilingly declined.

"Would you care to hear the gramophone?" queried the champion of that particular form of entertainment. "We've got some perfectly priceless George Robey ones—have you ever heard 'What there was, was Good?'" He moved towards the instrument.

"Never," said Sir William, taking advantage of the support afforded by the table and leaning back, "but nothing would give me greater pleasure."

The disk had no sooner commenced to revolve when Lettigne advanced with a soda-water bottle, a corkscrew and half a lemon, collected at random from the sideboard.

"I don't know if you like watching a bit of juggling," he said shyly, and began to throw into the air and catch his miscellany, while the trumpet of the gramophone proclaimed that "What there was, was Good," in stentorian, brazen shouts.

Sir William screwed his eyeglass tighter into his eye. "Remarkable!" he said warmly. "A remarkably deft performance! Capital! Capital!"

The Gunroom eyed one another anxiously. It was only a question of moments before the perspiring Bosh smashed something; the gramophone record was palpably cracked; their powers of entertainment were rapidly reaching their climax. Then came a diversion. The door opened and the Midshipman of the Watch entered.

"The Flagship's barge has called for you, sir," he said.

The gramophone stopped as if by magic, and the overheated juggler caught and retained the soda-water bottle, the corkscrew and the half lemon with a gasp of relief.

Sir William rose regretfully and held out his hand. "I have to thank you all for a very delightful quarter of an hour," he said, smiling, and took his departure amid polite murmurs of farewell, followed by James. Proof of his appreciation of the entertainment reached them a week later in the form of an enormous plum cake, and was followed thereafter at regular intervals by similar bounty.

Lettigne sat down and wiped his forehead.

"Phew!" he said when the door had closed behind the visitors. "Who was that old comic? I didn't catch his name."

"Sir William Thorogood," replied another. "He's full of grey-matter." He tapped his forehead, and stepping across to the common bookshelf indicated the back of a text-book on advanced mechanics. "That's one of his little efforts," he said.

Lettigne followed the other's finger. "Good night!" he ejaculated. "Have I been giving a display of my unequalled talents for the benefit of the man who has caused me more sleepless nights than Euclid himself? Here is poor old George Robey been shouting himself hoarse too——"

"And I haven't even looked at my mail yet," said Harcourt, drawing an unopened letter from his pocket. He slit the envelope and sat down in the vacated arm-chair. It was from his sister at school in Eastbourne, and enclosed another written in a vaguely familiar hand. Boy like he read the enclosure first:

"DEAR FATHER [it ran],—I have just put my name down for the boxing championship, and I'll do my best to win, because I know how awfully keen you are. All the same, I think it's a pity you took up that bet with Harcourt's father at the club. He probably can afford to lose and you can't. There are lots of things that Mother wants that ten pounds would buy. Besides, Harcourt is my best friend,

and if we both get into the finals it would be beastly and like fighting for money. I wish you hadn't told me. I must end now. With love to Mother and Dick. In haste, Your loving son, BILLY."

Harcourt, grown suddenly rather pale, picked up his sister's letter and read with puzzled brows:

"DEAR HARRY,—When I opened your last letter I found the enclosed. It had evidently been put in by mistake, because the envelope was in your handwriting. I am sending it back. . . . ."

Harcourt pursed up his lips into a whistling shape and refolded the enclosure. It was in Mordaunt's handwriting. But how did it get into the envelope he himself had addressed to his sister?

At that moment Mordaunt came across the mess holding out a letter.

"Harcourt," he said, "my father has just sent me this letter. Isn't it your handwriting?"

Harcourt took the sheet of paper and glanced at it. "Yes," he said, "it's one I wrote to my sister for her birthday. And here's one that she has just sent back to me. Is it yours by any chance?"

He carelessly extended the folded missive, and summoning all his self-possession, looked his friend in the eyes and smiled wanly. "I've only just read my sister's letter," he went on. "She seemed rather puzzled . . ."

Mordaunt took the proffered letter and nodded. "Yes," he said, "it's mine." He, too, paled a little. "I think I know what's happened. Do you remember that scrap just as we were finishing our letters the other night? Bosh pulled the table-cloth down and capsized everything. Our letters got mixed up, and we must have addressed each other's envelopes."

He stood turning the letter to his father over and over in his fingers.

"Well," said Harcourt reassuringly, "it doesn't matter much, old thing, does it? I'm just going to put this in another envelope and send it off to my sister, with a note to explain. There's no harm done! I don't suppose your letter was a matter of vast importance either, was it, Billy?" He spoke lightly, in a tone of amused indifference, and turned to the locker where he kept his writing materials. The other walked over to the stove, slowly tearing his letter into pieces.

"No," he said. "Oh, no . . . . none at all."

CHAPTER VI

Wet Bobs

A FLURRY of sleet came out of the east where a broad band of light was slowly widening into day.

The tarpaulin cover to the after hatchway was drawn aside as if by a cautious hand, and the rather sleepy countenance of the Young Doctor peered out into the dawning. An expression of profound distaste spread over it, and its owner emerged to the quarterdeck. There he stood shivering, looking about him as if he found the universe at this hour a grossly overrated place. After a few minutes' contemplation of it thus, he turned up the collar of his great coat, pulled his cap down until it gave him the appearance of a sort of Naval "Artful Dodger," and walked gloomily to the port gangway. The Officer of the Watch, who was partaking of hot cocoa in the shelter of the after superstructure, sighted this forlorn object.

"Morning, Pills!" he shouted. "She's called away: won't be long now." He wiped his mouth and came across the deck to where the other was standing. "Fine morning for a pull," he observed, throwing his nose into the air and sniffing like a

pointer. "Smell the heather? Lor'! it does me good to see all you young fellow-me-lads turning up here bright and early with the roses in your cheeks."

The Young Doctor turned a gamboge-tinted eye on the speaker.

"Dry up," he said, acidly.

The Officer of the Watch was moved to unseemly mirth. "Where's your crew, Pills? I don't like to see this hanging-on-to-the-slack the first morning of the training season. You're too easy going for a cox, by a long chalk, my lad. You ought to be going round their cabins now with a wet sponge, shouting 'Wet Bobs!' and 'Tally Ho!' and the rest of it."

"Dry up!" was the reply.

"An even temper, boundless tact, a firm manner and an extensive vocabulary—those were the essentials of the cox of a racing boat when *I* was a lad at College. Why did they make you cox, Pills?"

"'Cos I'm light," retorted the Doctor. "'Cos I'm a damn fool," he added with a sudden access of bitterness. "Look here, Tweedledee, what about this bloomin' boat? Here I've been standing for the last five minutes—ah, there she is."

He gazed distastefully at the lower boom, where two members of the galley's crew were casting off the painter that secured the boat to the Jacob's ladder.

"Now, then," said a loud and cheerful voice at their elbows, "where's this boat we've been hearing such a lot about?" A tall, athletic figure in football

shorts and swathed about with many sweaters, with a bright red cushion under his arm, stood gazing in the direction of the lower boom. "Well, I'm blowed," he said, "not alongside *yet?* You're a nice person, Pills, to leave the organisation of a racing boat's crew to." He looked round the quarterdeck. "Where're all the others? Lazy hogs! Here we are with the sun half over the foreyard and the boat not even manned.

The Surgeon eyed him severely. "You're none too smart on it yourself, Bunje. Where's Thorogood? Where's Number One? Where's Gerrard? Where's—ah, now they're coming."

A sleepy-eyed procession, athletically clad, but not otherwise conveying an impression of vast enthusiasm in the venture, trooped up the hatchway and congregated in a shivering group at the gangway.

"When I go away pulling," said the First Lieutenant, apparently addressing a watchful-eyed gull volplaning past with outstretched wings, "when I go away pulling, I like to get straight into the boat, shove off and start right in. It's this hanging about——"

"It's Tweedledee's fault," protested the coxswain bitterly. "I wrote it down last night on the slate. He's too busy guzzling cocoa to attend to his job, that's the truth of the matter. Are we all here now, anyway . . . ?" He scanned the faces of his little band of heroes. "Derreck!" he said suddenly.

"Now, where's Derreck? Really, this is just about the pink limit. How could anyone——"

"Hullo, hullo, hullo!" The form of the Engineer Lieutenant emerged from the superstructure and came skipping towards them. "Sorry, everybody! Am I late? My perishing servant forgot to call me. And then I couldn't find my little short pants. Tweedledee, I've just been having a lap at your cocoa: the Quartermaster said it was getting cold."

"Not mine," replied the Officer of the Watch. "I've finished mine. You've probaby drunk the Commander's. He put it down for a minute——"

The face of the Engineer Lieutenant grew suddenly anxious. "Well, what about getting into the boat and shoving off? What are we all standing about getting cold for? I vote we have a jolly good pull, too. Stay away for half-an-hour or so—eh?"

The long, slim galley came at length alongside under the manipulation of the two rather apathetic members of the galley's crew, and the officers' racing crew descended the gangway and took possession of her.

"Now then," said the Young Doctor, "sort yourselves out: Number One stroke, Gerrard bow, Bunje——"

"I'm going bow," said the Engineer Lieutenant. "I pulled bow at Keyham for two years, and in China——"

"If you stand there kagging* we'll never get

* Arguing.

away," interposed the coxswain, "and the Commander will want to know who drank his cocoa. Bunje second stroke, James third stroke. Derreck, you're second bow, and Tweedledum third bow, and for heaven's sake sit down and stop gassing, all of you."

Thorogood leaned forward and extended a stretcher for inspection.

"How the devil am I to pull with a stretcher like this, Pills?" he demanded. "It'll smash before we've gone a yard."

"When I was at Keyham," said the Engineer Lieutenant, slopping water over the canvas parcelling on his oar in a professional manner, "we used to have stretchers made with——"

"We don't want to hear about Keyham," said the First Lieutenant, "we want to get to work. Shove the perishing thing away, James, and stop chawing your fat. If it's good for Nelson it's good enough for you."

"Do we start training in earnest to-day?" demanded the India-rubber Man, gloomily rubbing his calves. "Because I don't mind admitting that I like to start gradually. 'Another-Little-Drink-Won't-Do-Us-Any-Harm' sort of spirit."

"We shan't start at all if Double-O Gerrard doesn't find that blessed boat-hook an' shove her off soon," retorted the long, lean third bow, speaking for the first time.

"I can't see without my glasses," complained the

bow, fumbling among the blades of the oars. "Where *is* the bloomin' thing? Ah, here we are!"

"Shove off forward!" bellowed the voice of the coxswain for the third time.

The bow leaned his weight behind the boathook against the ship's side, and the bows of the galley sheered off slowly.

"We're awa'," said the India-rubber Man, "we're awa'! Lord, 'ow lovely!"

They paddled desultorily for a few strokes. Then the bow "bucketed" and sent a shower of icy spray over the backs of the two after oarsmen. Their loud expostulations were followed by protests from Tweedledum.

"My oar's got a kink!" he announced lugubriously.

"Oars!" said the coxswain. "Now," he said grimly, with the air of a man who had reached the limit of human patience, "I'll give you all a minute. Ease up your belts, tie your feet down, have a wash and brush up, say your prayers, spit on your hands, and get comfortable once and for all. It's the last stand-easy you'll get. We're going to pull round the head of the line if it breaks blood-vessels."

The minute passed in invective directed chiefly against the oars, the stretchers, the crutches, the boat generally and the helmsman in particular. At the expiration of that time, however, they all sat up facing aft, with their hands expectantly gripping the looms

of their oars and profound gloom on every countenance.

The coxswain contemplated them dispassionately.

"You're a cheerful-looking lot to start out with to win the cup back!" was his comment. "Oars ready! 'Way together!"

The crew, like a child that suddenly tires of being naughty, bent to their oars, and the boat slid through the water under long, swinging strokes. . . .

* * * * *

Regatta-day broke calm and clear. The hands were piped to breakfast, and the Quartermaster of the Morning Watch, as the latest authority on the vagaries of the barometer, entered the Petty Officers' mess with the air of one in the intimate confidence of the High Gods.

"Glass 'igh an' steady," he announced, helping himself to sausage and mashed potatoes. "We'll 'ave it calm till mebbe five o'clock, then it'll blow from the south'ard. That's down the course. But we won't 'ave no rain to-day."

The Captain of the Forecastle, who read his "Old Moore's Almanac," and was susceptible to signs and portents, confirmed the optimism of the Quartermaster.

"I 'ad a dream last night," he said. "I was a-walkin' with my missus alongside the Serpentine—in London, that is. There was swans sailin' on it, an' we was 'eavin bits of bread to 'em. 'Fred,' she

says, 'you'll 'ave it beautiful for your regatta. You'll win,' she says, 'the Stokers' Cutters, the Vet'rans' Skiffs, the Orficers' Gigs, *an'* the All-comers.'"

"That's along of you eatin' lobster for supper last night," said the Ship's Painter, a sceptic who had a sovereign on a race not mentioned by the Captain of the Forecastle's wife. "Wot about the perishin' Boys' Cutters? Didn't your old Dutch say nothin' about them?"

The seer shook his head and performed intricate evolutions with a pin in the cavernous recesses of his mouth.

"Mebbe she would 'ave if she'd 'ad the chanst," was the reply. "But she didn't 'ave time to say no more afore the Réveillé interrupted 'er, an' I 'ad to turn out."

The Quartermaster of the Morning Watch concluded his repast. "Well," he said, "Mebbe she'll tell you the rest to-night. Then we'll know 'oo's 'oo, as the sayin' is. But there's one crew as I'll put my shirt on, an' that's the Orficers' Gigs."

"'Ow about the Boys' Cutters?" demanded the Ship's Painter, whose sovereign was in jeopardy.

"An' the Vet'rans' Skiffs," echoed the Captain of the Forecastle, "what my wife mentioned? 'Fred,' she says——"

"*An'* the All-Comers," interrupted the Captain of the Side, "wiv the Chief Buffer* coxin' the launch?"

The Quartermaster of the Morning Watch made

* Chief Boatswain's Mate.

a motion with an enormous freckled paw as if stroking an invisible kitten. "I ain't sayin' nothin' against 'em. Nothin' at all. What I says is, 'Wait an' see.' I ain't a bettin' man, not meself. But if anyone was to fancy an even 'arf quid——"

The shrill whistle of the call-boy's pipe clove the babel of the crowded mess-deck.

"A-a-away Racing Whaler's Crew!" shouted the cracked high tenor. "Man your boat!"

"There you are!" said the Blacksmith, a silent, bearded man. "What are we all 'angin' on to the slack for? Come on deck. That's the first race."

Regatta-day, even in War-time, was a day of high carnival. The dozen or so of Battleships concerned, each with its crew of over a thousand men, looked forward to the event much in the same spirit as a Derby crowd that gathers over-night on Epsom Downs. The other Squadrons of the vast Battle-fleet were disposed to ignore the affair; they had their own regattas to think about, either in retrospection or as an event to come. But in the Squadron immediately concerned it was, next to the annihilation of the German Fleet, the chief consideration of their lives, and had been for some weeks past.

For weeks, and in some cases months, the racing crews of launches, cutters, gigs, and whalers, officers and men alike, had carried through an arduous training interrupted only by attentions to the King's enemies and the inclemencies of the Northern spring. And now that the day had come, both spectators and

crews moved in an atmosphere of holiday and genial excitement heated by intership rivalry to fever-point.

A regatta is one of the safety valves through which the ships' companies of the silent Fleet in the North can rid themselves of a little superfluous steam. Only those who have shared the repressed monotony of their unceasing vigil can appreciate what such a day means. To be spared for a few brief hours the irksome round of routine, to smoke Woodbines the livelong day; to share, in the grateful sunlight, some vantage point with a "Raggie," and join in the full-throated, rapturous roars of excitement that sweep down the mile-long lane of ships abreast the sweating crews. This is to taste something of the fierce exhilaration of the Day that the Fleet is waiting for, and has awaited throughout the weary years.

A Dockyard tug, capable of accommodating several hundred men, lay alongside. The ship had swung on the tide at an angle to the course that obscured full view of the start. Those of the ship's company who desired a full complete spectacle from start to finish were to go away and anchor at some convenient point in the line, from which an uninterrupted panorama could be obtained. The device had other advantages: by anchoring midway down the course a flagging crew could be spurred on to mightier efforts by shouts and execrations, the beating of gongs, hooting syren and foghorns, whistles and impassioned entreaties.

Accordingly the more ardent supporters of the

various crews, armed with all the implements of noise and encouragement that their ingenuity could devise, embarked. They swarmed like bees over the deck and bridgehouse, they clung to the rigging and funnel stays, and perched like monkeys on the mast and derrick. Thus freighted the craft moved off amid deafening cheers, and took up a position midway between two Battleships moored in the centre of the line. The anchor was dropped, and the closely packed spectators, producing mouth-organs and cigarettes, prepared to while away the time until the commencement of the first race.

They belonged to a West-country ship—that is to say, one manned from the Dockyard Port of Plymouth. The master of the tug, whose interest in such matters was, to say the least of it, cosmopolitan, had anchored between two Portsmouth-manned Battleships. The position he had selected commanded a full view of the course, and there his responsibilities in the affair ended. On the other hand, the crews of the two Battleships in question, assembled in full strength on their respective forecastles in anticipation of the forthcoming race, regarded the arrival of the tug in the light of a diversion sent straight from Heaven.

The tug's cable had scarcely ceased to rattle through the hawse-pipe when the opening shots, delivered through a megaphone, rang out across the water.

"*'Ullo! Web-feet!*" bellowed a raucous voice.

"Yeer! Where be tu?" A roar of laughter followed this sally.

The occupants of the tug were taken by surprise. Their interests had hitherto been concentrated in the string of whalers being towed down to the distant starting-point by a picket boat. Before they could rally their forces a cross-fire of rude chaff, winged by uproarious laughter, had opened on either side. Catch-word and jest, counter and repartee utterly unintelligible to anyone outside Lower-deck circles were hurled to and fro like snowballs. Every discreditable incident of their joint careers as units of that vast fighting force, personalities that would have brought blushes to the cheeks of a Smithfield porter, the whole couched in the obscure jargon of Catwater and Landport taverns, rang backwards and forwards across the water, and withal the utmost good humour and enjoyment wreathing their faces with smiles.

The distant report of a gun sounded and a far-off roar of voices announced that the first race had started; straight-way the tumult subsided, and an expectant hush awaited the approach of the line of boats moving towards them like a row of furious water-beetles.

The race drew nearer, and ship after ship of the line took up the deep-toned roar. The names of the ships, invoked by their respective ship's companies as might the ancients have called upon their Gods, blended in one great volume of sound. The more

passionately interested supporters of the crews followed the strung-out competitors in steam-boats, and added their invocations to the rest.

A rifle cracked on board the end ship of the line, and the crew of the leading boat collapsed in crumpled heaps above their oars. The race was over. Onboard a ship half-way down the line a frantic outburst of cheering suddenly predominated above all other sounds, and continued unabated as the rifle cracked twice more in quick succession, announcing that the second and third boats had ended the race.

A hoist of flags at the masthead of the Flagship proclaimed the names of the first three crews, dipped, and was succeeded by the number of the next race. Again the gun in the bows of the Umpire's steam-boat sped the next race upon its way, and once more the tumult of men's voices rose and swelled to a gale of sound that swept along the line, and died to the tumultuous cheering of a single ship.

A couple of hours passed thus, and there remained one race before dinner, the Officers' Gigs. The events of the forenoon had considerably enhanced the reputation of the Captain of the Forecastle as a prophet. Furthermore, the result of the Boys' Race had enriched the Ship's Painter to the extent of a sovereign. It needed but the victory of the Officers' Gigs to place the ship well in sight of the Silver Cock, which was the Squadron Trophy for the largest number of points obtained by any individual ship.

The starting-point was the rallying-place for

every available steam- and motor-boat in the Squadron, crowded with enthusiastic supporters of the different crews. The Dockyard tug, with its freight of hoarse yet still vociferous sailor-men, had weighed her anchor, and moved down to the end of the line preparatory to steaming in the wake of the last race.

The Umpire, in the stern of an officious picket-boat, was apparently the only dispassionate participator in the animated scene. The long, graceful-looking boats, each with its crew of six, their anxious-faced coxswains crouched in the sterns, and tin flags bearing the numbers of their ships in the bows, were being shepherded into position. A tense silence was closing down on the spectators. It deepened as the line straightened out, and the motionless boats awaited the signal with their oars poised in readiness for the first stroke.

"Up a little, number seven!" shouted the starter wearily through his megaphone. Two hours of this sort of thing robs even the Officers' Gigs of much outstanding interest to the starter.

"Goo-o-o!" whispered one of the watching men. "'E don't 'arf know 'is job, the coxswain of that boat."

The boat in question with a single slow stroke moved up obediently.

"Stand by!" sang the metallic voice again. Then—

Bang! They were off.

As if released by the concussion, a wild pande-

monium burst from the waiting spectators' throats. The light boats sprang forward like things alive, and in their churning wakes came the crowded steamboats.

For perhaps two minutes the racing boats travelled as if drawn by invisible threads of equal length. Then first one and then another dropped a little. The bow of one of the outside boats broke an oar, and before the oarsman could get the spare one into the crutch the boat slipped to the tail of the race. The spare oar shipped, however, she maintained her position, and her crew continued pulling against hopeless odds with pretty gallantry.

Half-way down the mile course there were only four boats in it. The Flagship's boat led by perhaps a yard, with a rival on either side of her pulling stroke for stroke. Away to the right and well clear, the Young Doctor urged his crew on with sidelong glances out of the corner of his eye at the other boats.

"You've got 'em!" he said. "You've got 'em cold. Steady does it! Quicken a fraction, Number One. Stick it, Bow, stick it, lad!"

The Flagship's boat had increased her lead to half a length ahead of her two consorts: the Young Doctor's crew held her neck and neck. Then the Young Doctor cleared his dry throat and spoke with the tongues of men and fallen angels. He coaxed and encouraged, he adjured and abused them stroke by stroke towards their goal. The crew, with set,

white faces and staring eyes fixed on each other's backs, responded like heroes, but Double-O Gerrard was obviously tiring and the First Lieutenant's breath was coming in sobs. They were pulling themselves out.

The roar of voices on either side of the course surged in their ears like the sound of a waterfall. Astern of them was the picket-boat, a graceful feather of spray falling away on either side of the stem-piece. A concourse of Wardroom and Gunroom officers had crowded into her bows, and the Commander, purple with emotion, bellowed incoherencies through a megaphone.

Then, with one keen glance at the Flagship's crew and one at the rapidly approaching finishing line, the Young Doctor chose the psychological moment.

"Stand by!" he croaked. "Now, all together—*spurt!*"

His crew responded with the last ounce of energy in their exhausted frames. They were blind, deaf and dumb, straining, gasping, forcing "heart and nerve and sinew" to drive the leaden boat through those last few yards. Suddenly, far above their heads, rang out the crack of a rifle, and the next instant another. The crew collapsed as if shot.

For a moment none was capable of speech. Then the First Lieutenant raised his head from his hands.

"Which is it," he asked, "us or them?"

The Young Doctor was staring up at the mast-

head of the Flagship. A tangle of flags appeared above the bridge-screen.

"I can't read 'em," he said. "Which is it? Translate, someone, for pity's sake."

The crew of the Flagship's boat, lying abreast of them a few yards away, answered the question. They turned towards their late adversaries and began clapping. The next moment the Dockyard tug burst into a triumphant frenzy, and the picket-boat, full of cheering, clapping mess-mates, slid alongside to take the painter.

The First Lieutenant stretched out a large, blistered hand. "Shake, Pills," he said.

* * * * *

One race is, after all, very much like another. Yet the afternoon wore on without any appreciable abatement in the popular enthusiasm. And it was not without its memorable features. The Bandsmen's Race crowned one of the participators in undying fame. This popular hero broke an oar half-way through the race, and rising to his feet promptly sprang overboard.

His spectacular action plunged the remainder of the crew in hopeless confusion, and he himself was rescued with difficulty in a half-drowned state of collapse by the Umpire's boat. Yet for some occult reason no feat of gallantry in action would have won him such universal commendation on the Lower-deck. "Nobby Clark—'im as jumped overboard in

the Bandsmen's Race" was thereafter his designation among his fellows.

The last race—the All-comers—did not justify universal expectation. The treble-banked launch was indeed coxed by the Chief Boatswain's Mate. A "Funny-party" in the stern, composed of a clown, a nigger and a stout seaman in female attire, added their exhortations to the "Chief Buffer's" impassioned utterances. But the Flagship's galley, pulling eight oars, with the coxswain perched hazardously out over the stern, won the three-mile tussle, and won it well.

As the Quartermaster of the Morning Watch had foretold, a breeze sprang up towards the close of the day. It blew from the southward and carried down the lines a medley of hilarious sounds.

A drifter hove in sight, shaping course for the Fleet Flagship. She was crowded to suffocation with singing, cheering sailor-men, and secured to her stumpy bowsprit was a silver cock. As she approached the stern of the Flagship, however, the uproar subsided, and the densely thronged drifter was white with upturned, expectant faces.

A solitary figure was walking up and down the quarterdeck of the Battleship. He paused a moment, suddenly stepped right aft to the rail, and smilingly clapped his hands, applauding the trophy in the bows of the drifter. The last rays of the setting sun caught on the broad gold bands that ringed his sleeve almost from cuff to elbow.

A wild tumult of frantic cheering burst out almost like an explosion from every throat still capable of emitting sound. There was gratitude and passionate loyalty in the demonstration, and it continued long after the figure on the quarterdeck had turned away and the drifter had resumed her noisy, triumphant tour of the Fleet.

"That's what I likes about *'im,*" whispered a bearded seaman hoarsely, as they swung off on their new course. "'E's that *'Uman!*" He jerked his head astern in the direction of the mighty Battleship on whose vast quarterdeck the man who bore a share of the Destiny of Europe on his shoulders was still pacing thoughtfully up and down.

CHAPTER VII

Carrying On

THE fresh Northern breeze sent the waves steeple-chasing across the surface of the harbour, and lapping over the hull of a British Submarine as she moved slowly past the anchored lines of the Battle-fleet towards the entrance.

Her Commanding Officer stood beside the helms-man, holding a soiled chart in his hands: further aft on the elliptical railed platform of the conning tower a tall, angular, grey-haired man, clad in civilian garb, stood talking to the First Lieutenant. A Yeoman of Signals, his glass tucked into his left arm-pit, was securing the halliards to the telescopic mast, at which fluttered a frayed White Ensign. A couple of figures in sea-boots and duffle-coats were still coiling down ropes and securing fenders, crawling like flies about the whale-backed hull. A hundred and fifty feet astern of the conning-tower the unseen propellers threw the water into vortices that went curling away down the long wake.

"We'll pick up the trawler outside," said the Lieutenant-Commander, folding up the chart and sticking it into the breast of his monkey-jacket. "Deep water out there, and we can play about." His face was burned by the sun to the colour of an old brick

wall; the tanned skin somehow made his eyes look bluer and his hair fairer than was actually the case: it accentuated the whiteness of his teeth, and gave his quick smile an oddly arresting charm.

The elderly civilian considered him with grave interest before replying. "Thank you," he said. "That's just what I want to do—play about!"

"The other experts are all in the trawler, with the apparatus," supplemented the Lieutenant-Commander. "We're under your orders, sir, for these experiments."

"Thank you," said Sir William Thorogood, Scientist; he drew a cigar case out of his pocket. "I feel rather like a man accepting another's hospitality and spending the day trying to pick his brains."

The Submarine-Commander smiled rather grimly. "You mean you're trying to find a way of cutting our claws and making us harmless?" he said.

"Well—Fritz's claws," amended Sir William.

"Same thing," replied the Lieutenant-Commander. "What's ours to-day is theirs to-morrow—figuratively speakin', that is. If it's sauce for the goose it's sauce for the gander—just tit for tat, this game."

"That," said Sir William, "is rather a novel point of view. It's not exactly one that is taken by the bulk of people ashore."

The figure beside the helmsman crinkled up his eyes as he stared ahead and gave a low-voiced order to the helmsman. "Oh?" he said. "I don't know

much about what people ashore think, except that they're all rattled over this so-called Submarine menace. Anyone that's scared is apt to cling to one point of view."

"That is so," replied the Scientist. "But I chose to come out with you to-day for these experiments on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief."

"That's sound," said the Submarine expert. "Because, you know, in the Navy we all look at life from different points of view, according to our jobs. No, thanks, I won't smoke till we get outside. Now, those fellows"—the speaker jerked his head astern to the great grey Battleships—"those big-ship wallahs—they're only just beginning to take Us seriously. I put in my big-ship time at the beginning of the war—we do a year in a big ship, you know, for our sins—and the fellows in the Mess used to jeer at Us. They talked about their rams. . . ." He laughed. "Rams!" he repeated. "They called us pirates. P'raps we were, but we didn't carry bathrooms in those early boats—nor yet manicure sets. . . . Port ten! . . . Ease to five—steady!"

The speaker was silent for a moment, musing. "I don't know that I altogether blame 'em." He turned to his First Lieutenant, a youth some years his junior with preposterously long eyelashes. "'Member the manœuvres before the War?" The other laughed and nodded. "I torpedoed my revered parent's Battleship," continued the speaker, "at two hundred yards in broad daylight and a flat calm."

He chuckled. "Lor' bless *me!* It's like a fairy tale, lookin' back on it after two years of war."

"Haven't they rather altered their tune since, though?" asked the visitor.

"A bit, yes. They don't quite know how to take us nowadays. We come in from patrol and tie up alongside them to give the men the run of the canteen; they ask us to dinner and give cinema shows for the sailors, bless 'em. We're beginning to feel quite the giddy heroes when we find ourselves among the Battle-fleet."

"Cold feet," interposed the First Lieutenant. "That's what's behind it all. We're It. . . ."

Sir William laughed. "Well," he said, "what about those craft yonder? There I suppose you have yet another point of view?"

A division of Armed Trawlers lumbered out of their path, the bow gun on each blunt forecastle rising and dipping as they plunged in the incoming swell.

"Ah!" said the Lieutenant-Commander, "they're different. They never had any preconceived notions about us or their own invulnerability. The boot's on the other foot there. We used to jeer at them once; but now I'm not so certain. . . ."

"You never know what the hell they'll do next," explained the Lieutenant with the shadow of his eyelashes on his cheek-bone. "That's the trouble. 'They knows nothin' an' they fears nothin',' " he quoted, smiling.

"The personal element comes in more, I suppose, in those craft," said Sir William musingly. He focused his glasses on a turf cabin ashore. "The Admiral was telling me that a London brain specialist was born in one of those crofter's huts."

The Submarine Commander nodded. "It's not unlikely," he said. "These Northern fishermen are a fine breed. But this patrol work has developed a new type of seaman altogether. We've got a fellow up here huntin' Fritzes—he's a merchant seaman with a commission in the Naval Reserve. . . . There are times when he makes *me* frightened, that sportsman. It's a blessing the Hun can't reproduce his type: anyhow, I haven't met any over the other side, or up the Baltic."

"Name of Gedge?" enquired Sir William dryly.

"That's the lad," was the reply. "D'you know him, sir?"

"No, but I've heard of him."

"You'll see him presently," said the other. "He's waiting for us outside onboard his trawler. If you go onboard, have a look at the beam of his forehatch: rather interestin'."

"What about it?" asked Sir William.

"A little row of notches—that's all. He adds another from time to time, and I feel sort of sorry for Fritz when he's about."

"Like rats' tails hanging on a stable door," supplemented the First Lieutenant in explanation.

"I see," said Sir William. "This is going to be

interesting." He pitched the stump of his cigar overboard and turned up the collar of his ulster as the spray began to drift past their heads.

"We work together sometimes," said the Submarine Officer, "Gedge and I. Little stunts, you know. . . . It's part of my job, of course, huntin' Fritzes, but it's more than a job with him: it's a holy mission. That's why I'm a bit frightened of him really." The speaker searched the visitor's face with his guileless blue eyes. "I'm afraid of meeting him one day, unexpectedly, before I can establish our identity!" His quick smile flashed across his sunburnt face and was gone again.

The Submarine was passing under frowning walls of cliff, and the murmur of the surf thundering about the caverns and buttresses of that rock-bound coast almost drowned the throb of the engines beneath their feet. Far out to seaward a formation of Minesweeping Sloops crept away to the west. Close inshore, where the gulls circled vociferously, an insignificant trawler with a rusty funnel lay rolling in the swell. A wisp of bunting jerked to the stumpy foremast, and a pair of hand-flags zigzagged above the trawler's wheel-house. The Yeoman of Signals on the Submarine's conning tower stiffened like a statue as he read the message.

"Says, 'Will Sir William Thor-r-ogood come aboar-r-d, sir? If so, he'll send a boat.'" His speech placed him at home in these Northern latitudes.

"Reply, 'Yes. Please send boat.'"

A quarter of an hour later Sir William was climbing out of a tubby dinghy over the trawler's bulwarks. A big bronzed man in a jersey and sea-boots, wearing the monkey-jacket of a Lieutenant of the Reserve and a uniform cap slightly askew, came forward, one enormous hand outstretched in greeting. "Pleased to meet you, sir," he said. "My name's Gedge."

Sir William shook hands and winced.

"I've heard of you," he said, "and I was anxious to meet you. What d'you think of that toy?"

He nodded aft at a web of wire-coils, vulcanite levers and brass keys, standing beneath a wooden shelter in the stern. Three or four officers from the Fleet were gathered round it with note-books in their hands testing and adjusting amid its intricacies.

"I've been lookin' at it," admitted the big man non-committally. "It sounds like a cinch, but I understand it ain't perfect yet?"

"Not by what you might call a long chalk," was the dry reply.

The big man looked relieved. "That's all right," he said. "Because when it is I guess I can go right along and get to bed. That little outfit's going to finish the war, sir."

"Hardly," said Sir William. "But it's intended to help things in that direction. Unfortunately, you see, there's still a factor—what we call an unknown

quantity——" He lapsed into technical explanations. The other listened for a while and then shook his head.

"Maybe you're right," he said, "but I couldn't say. I'm no scholar—ran away from school too young. But it seems to me——" He lifted a booted foot and rested it on the low gunwale. "Workin' at long distances, there's the pull of the tides. . . ."

Sir William's eyeglass dropped. He recovered it and screwed it home.

"Am I right, sir?" asked the big man.

"You are," said the Scientist. "You've studied tides, too, have you?"

The Submarine Hunter chuckled. "I've learned to respect 'em," he replied dryly. "Down the Malay Archipelago I learned something about tides, spittin' overboard from salvage craft. . . ." He stood upright. "Well, sir, we'd better get to business. These gentlemen here are the brains of the party"—he nodded at the group aft. "I'm only in the picture to put them wise as to certain practical conditions of the game. . . ." He dropped his voice to a confidential undertone as they walked aft. "The Navy scares me. It's so damned big, and there's so much gold lace—and it's so almighty efficient. . . ."

Half an hour's discussion settled the *modus operandi* for the experiment. The Submarine Commander rose from the gunwale and tossed away his cigarette-end, then he grinned at the Submarine Hunter who stood with one shoulder against the

structure aft, shredding tobacco into the palm of his hand.

"Gardez-vous, Old Sport!" he said, as he began to climb down into the dinghy, where Sir William joined him.

"That's French, ain't it?" said the Submarine Hunter. "Don't speak the lingo."

One of the Naval officers standing by the apparatus laughed. "It's a challenge," he said. "Means 'Mind your eye!'"

The Hunter jerked his clasp knife in the direction of the fore-hatch. "I can mind it all right," he replied grimly, and laughed with a sudden disconcerting bark of amusement.

* * * * *

"Now," said the Submarine Commander as the pointed bows swung round for the open sea, "we'll get way out of it. Must keep on the surface for a while—too many short-tempered little patrol boats close in to let us cruise with only a periscope showing." He waved his hand in the direction of countless smudges of smoke ringing the clear horizon. "But once we're clear of those we'll dive and hide somewhere for a while. Give old man Gedge something to scratch his head about, lookin' for us. Then we'll play round and test the apparatus. . . . You'll be able to observe the compass all the time, and I'll give you the distances. There's a young flood making. . . ."

For the space of a couple of hours the boat slid

swiftly through the waves and successive cordons of patrols passed them onwards with flickering signals. The men onboard a line of rusty drifters leaned over the sides of their plunging craft and waved as the jaws of their baleful traps opened to let them pass through. Above their heads a gull circled inquisitively, shrilling the high, thin Song of the Seventh Sea: astern the peaks of Ultima Thule faded like opals into the blue.

A little cluster of rocky islands rose at length out of the sea ahead; the Submarine Commander took a swift bearing and rolled up the chart.

"That'll do," he said; "now we'll dive. There's a shoal patch hereabouts, and we'll sit on the bottom and have lunch while old man Gedge starts looking for us. After lunch we'll let him get near and try a bit of daylight stalking." He glanced at the sun overhead. "Bit early, yet awhile," he added.

One by one, led by Sir William, they descended the steel-runged ladder into the electric-lit depths of the Submarine. A hatch closed with a muffled clang: a few curt orders were followed by a succession of gurgles like those of the tide flooding through a cavern; the Commanding Officer moved from the eyepiece of the periscope, and gravely contemplated a needle creeping slowly round the face of a large dial. A Petty Officer, with an expression emotionless as that of a traveller in a railway tunnel, sat by the dial manipulating a brass wheel; a few feet away sat a Leading Seaman similarly employed. The eyes of

both men were fixed on the hesitating needle as it shivered round. Finally the needle wavered, crept on another inch and paused, trembling. The Lieutenant-Commander glanced fore and aft, stripped off a pair of soiled gauntlets and made a low-voiced observation. The two men, as if released from a spell, turned away from their dials.

"There we are," said the Captain cheerfully, "sitting snug on a nice sandy bottom in ten fathoms of water. What's for lunch?" He led the way forward to a folding table between the polished mahogany bunks. "Fried chops, ain't it?" he enquired, sniffing.

They took their seats on camp stools while a bluejacket dealt out tin plates like playing cards. Sir William turned from a scrutiny of the tiny bookshelf over the port bunk. At the head of the bunk was nailed the photograph of a girlish face, and in close proximity to it one of a lusty baby exploring a fur rug apparently in search of clothes.

"Not much of a library, I'm afraid," said the host, seating himself. "I'm not much of a reader myself. The Sub's the bookworm of this boat."

The First Lieutenant of the Submarine shot a swift glance of suspicion at his Commanding Officer as he helped himself to a chop. The look, however, appeared to pass unnoticed.

"Some months ago," continued his Captain, speaking with his mouth full, "we were caught in shallow water over the other side——" he jerked his

head upwards and to the South East. "We were sitting on the bottom waiting for it to get dark before we came up and charged batteries. I was having a stretch-off on my bunk here, and the Sub, of course, had his nose in a book as usual. From subsequent developments it appears that a Hun seaplane saw us and proceeded to bomb us with great good will but indifferent success."

"We ought never to have been there," interrupted the First Lieutenant coldly. "Bad navigation on the Captain's part."

"Granted," said the Lieutenant-Commander. "The first bomb was rather wide of the mark, but it woke me, and I saw the Sub's eyelids flicker. After that I watched him. The Hun bombed us steadily for a quarter of an hour (missing every time, of course), and the Sub never raised his eyes from his book."

"I was interested," said the First Lieutenant shortly; his eyes, in one swift glance captain-wards, said more.

"Quite. I was only trying to prove you were a book-worm."

"What was the book?" enquired Sir William.

"Oh, Meredith, sir. Richard something-or-another. Topping yarn."

The guest steered the conversation out of literary channels.

"Were you over the other side much?" he asked blandly.

"Pretty well all the war, till we came up North," was the Lieutenant-Commander's reply. "You'll have to use the same knife for the butter; hope you don't mind. We get into piggish ways here, I'm afraid. . . . Amusin' work at times, but nothing to the Dardanelles; we never got out there, though; spent all our time nuzzling sandbanks off the Ems and thereabouts. Of course, one sees more of Fritz in that way, but I can't say it exactly heightens one's opinion of him. We used to think at the beginning of the war that Fritz was a sportsman—for a German, you know. But he's really just a dirty dog taking very kindly to the teaching of bigger and dirtier dogs than himself."

Sir William pondered this intelligence. "That's the generally accepted theory," he said.

"They may have had some white men in their submarines at one time, but we've either downed them or they've got Prussianized. They've disgraced the very word submarine to all eternity." The speaker shook his head over the besmirched escutcheon of his young profession.

"They're cowards, all right," added the Lieutenant. "'Member that Fritz we chased all the way to Heligoland on the surface?"

"Yep. Signalled to him with a flashing lamp to stop and fight: called him every dirty name we could lay our tongues on. Think he'd turn and have it out? Not much! . . . Yet he had the bigger gun and the higher speed. Signalled back, 'Not to-day, thank

you!' and legged it inside gun-range of the forts. Phew! That made us pretty hot, didn't it, Sub?"

"Nerves," said the Lieutenant. "Their nerves are just putrid. There was another night once——" he talked quickly between spoonfuls of rice pudding. "In a fog . . . . we were making a lightship off the Dutch coast to verify our position. . . . Approached submerged, steering by sound of their submarine bell, and then came to the surface to get a bearing. There must have been half a dozen Fritzes round that light, all lost and fluttering like moths round a candle. We bagged one, sitting, and blew him to hell. . . . The rest plopped under like a lot of seals and simply scattered. Fight? 'Not to-day, thank you.' They're only good for tackling unarmed merchantmen and leaving women in open boats." The speaker wiped his mouth with his napkin. "By God! I wouldn't be a Hun when the war's over. They're having a nice little drop of leave now to what they'll get if they ever dare put their noses outside their own filthy country."

"Amen," said Sir William.

The Captain of the boat rose from his seat, glancing at his watch. "Now then," he said to the Scientist, "Come to the periscope and let's have a look round. Gedge ought to be over the horizon by now."

The men moved quietly to their stations and the tanks were blown. Slowly the gauge needles crept back on their appointed paths. The Submarine Com-

mander motioned his guest to the periscope and gave him a glimpse of flying spray and sun-kissed wave tops. A mile or so away lay the group of islands they had seen before lunch, and close inshore a mass of floating débris bobbed among the waves.

"Baskets, I think—jettison of sorts. I'm going to get amongst it and go down with the tide, keeping the periscope hidden: it's an old dodge. You can just see the smoke of Gedge's bus coming over the horizon. We'll give him a little game of Peep-bo!"

Sir William drew his watch from his pocket and walked over to the compass. "In four minutes' time," he said, "I shall start making observations: according to our arrangements Gedge should start the experiment then."

"That's right," said the Lieutenant-Commander with his eyes pressed against the eye-piece of the periscope. "Oh, good! It's bales of hay floating, not baskets. Better still: no chance of damaging the periscope. There's Gedge——!

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Hee! Hee! Hee!
I see you, but you can't see me!"

He slewed the periscope through a few points and back to the original position. "Hullo!" he said presently, "what's he up to? He's altered course. . . . Thinks he sees something, I suppose. You're wrong, my lad. We're not in that direction."

The minutes passed in silence. Forward in the

bow compartment a man was softly whistling a tune to himself. The feet of the figure at the periscope moved with a shuffle on the steel plating.

"How's the time?" he asked presently.

"He ought to have started the apparatus," said Sir William, standing, watch in hand, by the compass. "What's he doing?"

"Legging it to the Northward at the rate of knots —eight points off his course, if he thinks he's going to get anywhere near us . . . . Ah! Now he's coming round. . . . Humph! You're getting warm, my lad!" Another prolonged silence followed, and suddenly the Lieutenant-Commander spoke again.

"Sub," he said in a curiously restrained tone, "just come here a minute."

The Lieutenant moved obediently to his side and applied his eye to the periscope.

"Well?" said the Captain after a pause. "Well, Sister Anne?"

The Lieutenant turned his head swiftly for an instant and looked at his Commanding Officer. "Have we got any boat out on this patrol to-day?" he asked.

The other shook his head. "Not within thirty miles of this. 'Sides, he wouldn't come through here submerged, with only his periscope dipping."

"It's a Fritz, then," said the Lieutenant, an ominous calm in his voice. He stepped aside and relinquished the eye-piece.

"It is," said the other. "It's a naughty, disobedient Fritz. He's coming through in broad daylight,

which he's been told not to do. He hasn't seen us yet—he's watching old man Gedge. Gedge thinks it's us and is pretending he hasn't seen him. . . . Lord! It's like a French musical comedy."

Sir William put his watch back in his pocket and stood looking from one speaker to the other. Finally he removed his eye-glass and began to polish it with scrupulous care.

"Do I understand——" he began.

The voice of the Lieutenant-Commander at the periscope cut him short. "Stand by the tubes!" he shouted.

There was a swift bustle of men's footsteps down the electric-lit perspective of glistening machinery.

"Fritz must be in a tearing hurry to get home," commented the First Lieutenant. "P'raps they've all got plague or running short of food . . . or just tired of life?"

"P'raps," conceded the Lieutenant-Commander. "Anyhow, that's as may be. . . . The beam torpedo tube will just bear nicely in a minute." The white teeth beneath the rubber eye-piece of the periscope showed for an instant in a broad grin. "Won't old man Gedge jump!"

"Starboard beam tube ready!"

Sir William replaced his eye-glass. A sudden bead of perspiration ran down and vanished into his left eyebrow.

"The Lord," said the Lieutenant in a low voice,

"has placed the enemy upon our lee bow, Sir William."

"Has he?" said Sir William dryly. "Then I hope He'll have mercy on their souls."

The motionless figure at the periscope gave a couple of low-voiced orders, and in the ensuing silence Sir William felt the artery in his throat quicken and beat like a piston. Then—

"Fire!"

The boat rolled to port, and all her framework shook like the body of a man shaken by a sudden sob. Back she came to her original trim, and the Lieutenant, standing by the beam tube, raised his wrist watch and studied it intently. The seconds passed, throbbing, intolerable, and merged into Eternity. A sudden concussion seemed to strike the boat from bow to stern, and as she steadied the motionless figures, standing expressionless at their stations, suddenly sprang into life and action.

There was the metallic sound of metal striking metal as the hatchway opened, a rush of cool, sweet air, and the Scientist found himself beside the two officers, without the slightest recollection of how he got there, standing in the wind and sunlight on the streaming platform of the conning-tower. The boat was heading with the waves tumbling away on either side of them in the direction of a cloud of grey smoke that still hung over the water, slowly dissolving in the wind. As they approached a dark patch of oil spread outwards from a miniature maëlstrom

where vast bubbles heaved themselves up and broke; the air was sickly with the smell of benzoline, and mingled with it were the acrid fumes of gas and burnt clothing. A dark scum gathered in widening circles, with here and there the white belly of a dead fish catching the sun: a few scraps of wreckage went by, but no sign of a man or what had once been a man.

"Pretty shot," said the First Lieutenant approvingly, and leaned over the rail to superintend the dropping of a sinker and buoy. The Commanding Officer said nothing. Beneath the tan his face was white, and his hand, as he raised his glasses to sweep the horizon, trembled slightly.

The Yeoman of Signals turned to Sir William and jerked his thumb at the water. "Eh!" he said soberly, "yon had a quick call!"

"I ask for no other when my hour strikes," replied the Scientist.

"Maybe juist yeer hands are clean," said the Yeoman, and turned to level his telescope at the trawler which was rapidly approaching with a cloud of smoke reeling from her funnel and the waves breaking white across her high bows.

"Here comes Gedge," observed the Lieutenant-Commander, speaking for the first time, "foaming at the mouth and suffering from the reaction of fright. Hark! He's started talking. . . ."

Amid the cluster of figures in the trawler's bow stood a big man with a megaphone to his mouth.

The wind carried scraps of sentences across the water.

". . . Darned bunch of tricks aft. . . . How was I to know. . . . Scared blue . . . torpedo . . . prisoners. . . . Blamed inventors. . . ."

"Translate," said Sir William. The Lieutenant-Commander coughed apologetically. "He's peevish," he said. "Thought it was us blowing up at first. Wants to know why we wasted a torpedo: thinks he could have captured her and taken the crew prisoners if we'd left it to him."

"Silly ass!" from the First Lieutenant. "How could we let him know he was playing round with a Fritz? If we'd shown ourselves Fritz would have torpedoed us!"

"I appreciate the compliment," began Sir William, "that he implies to my device, but, as a matter of fact, I hardly think the apparatus is sufficiently perfect yet——"

The Lieutenant-Commander laughed rather brutally. "He isn't paying compliments. He went on to say he didn't want the assistance of—er—new inventions to bag a Fritz once he's sighted him."

The First Lieutenant came quickly to the rescue. "Of course," he said, "that's all rot. We're only too grateful to—to Science for trying to invent a new gadget. . . . Only, you see, sir, in the meanwhile, *until* you hit on it we feel we aren't doing so badly—er—just carrying on."

CHAPTER VIII

"Arma Virumque . . . ."

THE Flagship's Wardroom and the smoking-room beyond were packed to suffocation by a dense throng of officers. The Flagship was "At Home" to the Fleet that afternoon on the occasion of the Junior Officers' Boxing Tournament which was being held onboard, and a lull in the proceedings had been the signal for a general move below in quest for tea.

Hosts and guests were gathered round the long table, standing in pairs or small groups, and talking with extraordinary gusto. Opportunities of intercourse between ships are rare in War-time. Save for an occasional visitor to lunch or dinner, or a haphazard meeting on the golf-links, each ship or flotilla dwelt a little community apart. On occasions such as this, however, the vast Fleet came together; Light Cruiser met Destroyer with a sidelong jerk of the head and a "Hullo, Old Thing . . ." that spanned the years at a single leap; Submarine laughed across the room at Seaplane-carrier; Mine-sweeper and Mine-layer shared a plate of sandwiches with a couple of Sloops and discussed the boxing; but they were no more than a leavening amid the throng of "big-ship folk" who reckoned horse-power by the

half hundred thousand and spoke of guns in terms of the 15-inch.

Almost every rank of Naval officer was represented, from Commander to Sub-Lieutenant and their equivalent ranks in other branches; yet the vast majority shared a curious resemblance. It was elusive and quite apart from the affinity of race. The high physical standard demanded of each on entry, the athletic training of their early years, the stern rigour of life afloat, perhaps accounted for it. But in many of the tanned, clean-shaven faces there was something more definite than that; a strain that might have been transmitted by the symbolic Mother of the Race, clear-eyed and straight of limb, who still sits and watches beneath stern calm brows the heritage of her sons.

A few there were among the gathering with more than youth's unwisdom marring mouth and brow; eyes tired with seeing over-much looked out here and there from the face of Youth. Yet amid the wholesome, virile cheerfulness of that assembly they were but transient impressions, lingering on the mind of an observer with no more permanency than the shadows of leaves flickering on a sunny wall.

A Lieutenant-Commander, on whose left breast the gaudy ribbons of Russian decorations hinted at the nature of his employment during the War, was talking animatedly to a Lieutenant with the eagle of the Navy-that-Flies above the distinction lace on his cuff. A grave-faced Navigating Commander, scent-

ing the possibility of an interesting discussion between these exponents of submarine and aerial warfare, pushed his way towards them through the crush.

". . . I remember her quite well," the Flying Man was saying as he stirred his tea. "Nice little thing . . . married, is she? Well, well . . ."

"You're a nice pair," said the Commander, smiling. "I came over here expecting to hear you both discussing the bursting area of a submarine bomb, and find you're talking scandal."

"It's a year old at that," said the be-ribboned one, with a laugh. "I've just come back from the White Sea, but I seem to know more about what Timmin's lady friends have been doing in the meanwhile than he does himself!"

He bit into a sardine sandwich with white, even teeth and laughed again. A great hum of men's voices filled the room. Scraps of home gossip exchanged between more intimate friends, and comments on the afternoon's boxing mingled with tag-ends of narratives from distant seas and far-off shores. It was nearly all war, of course, Naval war in some guise or other, and it covered most of the navigable globe.

A general conversation of this nature cannot be satisfactorily reproduced. A person slowly elbowing his way from the big tea-urns at one end of the mess to the smoking-room at the other, would, in his passage, cut off, as it were, segments of talk such as the following:

". . . Ripping little boxer, isn't he? I had his term at Osborne College, but he's learnt a good deal since then. . . . ."

* * * * *

". . . Jess? Poor little dog: she was killed by a 4-inch shell in that Dogger Bank show. I've got an Aberdeen terrier now."

* * * * *

". . . Bit of a change up here, isn't it, after being under double awnings for so long? But the Persian Gulf was getting rather boring . . . were you invalided too?"

* * * * *

". . . Not they! They won't come out—unless their bloomin' Emperor sends them out to commit a sort of hari-kiri at the end of the war. . . . That's what makes it so boring up here. . . . ."

* * * * *

"As a matter of fact we caught the Turk who laid most of the mines in the Tigris. He conned us up the river—we put him in a basket and slung him on the bowsprit: just in case he got careless, what? . . ."

* * * * *

". . . . Beer? My dear old lad, the Japs had scoffed all the beer in Kiao-Chau before I got into the main street. . . ."

* * * * *

". . . I had a Midshipman up with me as observer—aged 16 and 4 months precisely. . . . Those machines scared the Arabs badly. . . ."

* * * * *

". . . Just a sharpened bayonet. You slung it round your neck when you were swimming. . . . Only had to use it once . . . nasty sticky job. No joke either, crawling about naked on your belly in the dark. . . ."

* * * * *

". . . We had a fellow chipping the ice away from the conning-tower hatch all the time we were on the surface, 'case we had to close down quick. I tell you, it was Hell, that cold! . . . ."

* * * * *

". . . Five seconds after we had fired our torpedo a shell hit the tube and blew it to smithereens. A near thing, I give you my word. . . ."

* * * * *

A Lieutenant-Commander appeared at the doorway from the smoking-room.

"There will be an exhibition bout next," he shouted, "and then the final of the Lightweights!" A general move ensued on to the upper deck.

The raised ring was in amidships before the after superstructure. The officers occupied tiers of chairs round three sides of the platform. The Admirals and their staffs in front, and the Post-captains of

the ships that had entered competitors, just behind. On the forward side, extending the whole breadth of the ship, was the dense array of the ship's company. The majority were in tiers on planks, but a number had found their way to other points of vantage, and were clustered about the funnel casings and turrets and even astride the great guns themselves. A murmur of men's voices, punctuated by the splutter of matches as hundreds of pipes were lit and relit, went up on all sides. The judges were taking their seats at the little tables on either side of the ring, and the referee, an athletic-looking Commander, was leaning over from his chair talking to the Chaplain who was acting as time-keeper.

The Physical Training Officer of the Flagship stepped into the empty ring and raised his hand for silence. The hum of voices died away instantly, and in the stillness the thin, querulous crying of the gulls somewhere astern alone was audible.

"Lieutenant Adams, Welter-weight Champion of the Navy, and Seaman Hands, ex-Middle-weight Champion of England, have kindly consented to give an exhibition of sparring," he proclaimed, and withdrew.

During the applause that greeted the announcement a youthful figure, clad in a white singlet and football shorts, with a sweater thrown over his shoulders, ducked under the ropes and walked rather shyly to his corner of the ring. His appearance was the signal for a vociferous outburst of applause. He

sat down, holding the sweater about his shoulders with his gloved hands, and thoughtfully rubbing the sole of his left boot in the powdered resin.

The clapping suddenly redoubled, and a broad, bull-necked man of about forty vaulted lightly into the ring and took his place in the opposite corner. He was stripped to the waist; his jaws moved mechanically about a piece of chewing gum, and an expression of benign good-humour and enjoyment lit his battered, kindly countenance.

It was not until the gong sounded and the two men rose from their chairs that the contrast between the toughened ex-professional and the lithe, graceful amateur brought forth a little murmur of delight from the vast audience.

In the sordid surroundings of the prize ring there might have been a suggestion of brutality about the older man. The great hairy chest, the knotted arms covered with barbaric tattooing, the low-crowned skull and projecting lower jaw gave him an aspect of almost savage, remorseless strength softened only by the gentleness of his eyes. He moved as lightly as a cat, and from shoulder to thigh the muscles stirred obedient to every motion.

The Lieutenant was perhaps fifteen years the junior. The playing fields or racquet-courts of any university would recognise his type as nothing out of the common. Deep-chested, lean-flanked, perfectly proportioned, and perhaps a shade "fine-drawn"—England and America carelessly produce and main-

tain the standard of this perfection of physical beauty as no other white race can.

The two men met in the centre of the ring, and as they shook hands the old pugilist grinned almost affectionately. The lack of several front teeth incidental to his late profession was momentarily apparent, and an enthralled Ordinary Seaman, perched insecurely on the lower funnel casing, drew his breath in relief.

"'E won't 'urt 'im," he said in a whisper, as if to reassure himself.

"Course 'e won't!" replied a companion, expelling a cloud of tobacco smoke between his lips. "'S only a bit o' skylarkin' . . . Gawd!" he added in awed tones. "That one 'ud kill a donkey if 'e started 'ittin'."

The two boxers had slipped into their habitual poses and were quietly moving round each other. The graceful activity of the amateur was somewhat characteristic of his school, while the ex-professional contented himself with almost imperceptible movements of his feet, watching with a nonchalant yet wary caution for the coming attack. With the suddenness of a flash the Lieutenant led with his left and was back out of harm's way again.

True and quick was the blow, but the veteran's defence was even quicker. Without raising either glove he appeared to have swayed backwards from the hips. His adversary's glove should have landed full in his face; but so perfectly was his defence

timed that it just reached him and no more. The battered face, with its amiable, reassuring smile and slowly moving jaws, had not winked an eyelid.

Then for three short rounds there followed a completely enthralling display. On one side was perfectly trained orthodox, amateur boxing. On the other every clean trick and subterfuge of irreproachable ring-craft. Timing, footwork, feints, guarding and ducking; each subtlety of the art of defence was demonstrated in turn.

In the last few seconds of the final round, however, a little out of breath with his defensive display, the older man changed his tactics. With lowered head and ferocious face he advanced, a whirling bulk of might and action, upon the amateur. Tap—tap—tap! Left—right, over and under, through the guard and round the guard of the outfought youngster the unclenched gloves totted up a score of points. There was a careful restraint behind each blow, yet, when the gong sounded and they smilingly shook hands amid tumults of enthusiasm, a thin red stream was trickling from the right eyebrow of the amateur champion. . . .

As they left the ring two boyish forms slipped through the ropes and made their way to their respective corners. They both wore the orthodox white singlet and blue shorts, and round each waist was twisted the distinguishing coloured sash, one red and the other green. They sat down with their gloved

hands resting on their thin knees and gravely surveyed the sea of expectant faces. Both bore traces of previous conflicts on their features, and their united ages aggregated something just over thirty.

The Physical Training Officer again advanced to the ropes. "Final of the Junior Officers' Lightweights!" he announced. "Midshipman Harcourt on the left—green; Midshipman Mordaunt on my right—red," and added the name of their ship. He looked from one to the other interrogatively, and they nodded in turn. Stepping back he resumed his seat amid a tense silence.

"Seconds out of the ring!"

Then the gong rang, and the two wiry figures rose to their feet and stepped briskly to meet each other. The wearer of the green colours was smiling, but his slim adversary looked grave and rather pale with compressed lips.

Their gloves met for an instant, and the fight started. There was little or no preliminary sparring. Each knew the other's tactics by heart. It was just grim, dogged, ding-dong fighting. In height and weight they were singularly evenly matched, but Harcourt soon gave evidences of being unquestionably the better boxer. He boxed coolly and scientifically, but what his opponent lacked in style he made up in determination. Twice his furious attacks drove Harcourt to the ropes, and twice the latter extricated himself nimbly and good-humouredly. Between the thud of gloves and the patter of their feet on

the canvas-covered boards their breathing was audible in the tense hush of the ring-side.

Ding! went the gong, and the first round was over. They walked to their corners amid a tempest of appreciative applause, and were instantly pounced upon by their anxious seconds.

In one of the chairs just below the ring, Thorogood removed his pipe from his mouth and turned his head to speak to Mouldy Jakes, who sat beside him.

"Good fight, eh?" he said, smiling. "Harcourt ought to win, of course, but Mordaunt's fighting like a young tiger. He's no boxer, either. I'm bothered if I know how he got into the finals."

"Guts!" said the other. "Sheer guts! He won't last, though. Harcourt 'll start piling up the points in the next round."

But when the second round started, Mordaunt developed unexpected skill in defence. Harcourt led off with an offensive, but his opponent dodged and ducked and guarded until the first fury of the onslaught abated, and then a savage bout of in-fighting quickly equalised matters, until as the end of the round approached disaster very nearly overtook the red colours. Mordaunt swung rather wildly with his right and missed. Harcourt's watchful left landed on the side of his opponent's head as he lost his equilibrium, and Billy Mordaunt went down with a thud.

He was on his feet again the next instant, his

eyes fairly alight with battle, and his lip curled back savagely. In a whirlwind of smashing blows he drove Harcourt to the ropes again, until a straight left between the eyes sobered him.

Ding! went the gong again, and again the applause burst out. The seconds fell upon their men with furious energy. The water in the basins was assuming a pinkish tinge, and they sponged and massaged and flapped their towels as if striving to impart something of their own vigour to their tired principals. The two combatants, breathing hard, were leaning back with outstretched arms and legs, every muscle in their resting bodies relaxed.

"Harcourt *ought* to win, you know," said Thorogood again. "He's just as fit and a better boxer. But he seems to be tiring. . . . He had a pretty tough time in the heats, I fancy."

"Seconds out of the ring! Last round!" came the Chaplain's voice. Then the gong brought them to their feet.

They shook hands unsmiling, and began to circle cautiously, sparring for an opening. Then Harcourt led. It was a stinging blow and it landed fair enough. Billy took it, and several more; for a moment it looked as if he had shot his bolt. Then he seemed suddenly to gather all his tiring strength. He feinted and hit lightly with his left. Harcourt blocked it, then unexpectedly lowered his guard; a little mocking smile flitted over his blood-smeared face. Billy's right came in with every ounce of

muscle and sinew in his body to back the jolt, and it landed fair on the point of that flaunting chin so temptingly offered.

It seemed to Billy that Harcourt disappeared into a mist. There was a thud and a great roar of voices and the sounds of clapping.

"Stand back!" said a warning voice at the ringside, and somewhere, apparently in the distance, another voice was counting the deliberate seconds:

". . . Five! Six! Seven!"

The angry mist cleared away and revealed Harcourt sprawling on the ground. He was leaning over on both hands, striving gallantly to rise.

". . . Eight! Nine!"

The white figure with the green sash was on hands and knees, swaying——

The gong rang. Down and out!

The referee glanced from one judge to the other and raised a little red flag from the table.

"Red wins!" he shouted.

Unconscious of the deafening applause Billy bent down and slipped an arm under his friend's shoulders. All the savage fighting blood in him had suddenly cooled, and there was only pity and love for Harcourt in his heart as he helped him to his feet.

Harcourt's seconds had rushed into the ring as the gong rang, and they now supported him to his corner. At his feeble request one unlaced the glove from his right hand, which he extended to his late adversary with a wan smile.

"That was a good 'un, Billy," he said faintly. "My—head's—still singing . . . like a top! And—I taught it to you! . . ."

* * * * *

The distribution of prizes to the winners of the different weights followed, and then the great gathering broke up. The Admirals departed with their staffs in their respective barges, the Captains in their galleys, Wardroom and Gunroom officers in the picket-boats. Figures paced up and down the quarterdeck talking together in pairs; farewells sounded at the gangways, and the hoot of the steamboats' syrens astern mingled with the ceaseless calling of the gulls overhead.

Harcourt and Mordaunt, descending the accommodation ladder in the rear of the remainder of their party, were greeted by Morton, at the wheel of the picket-boat, with a broad grin.

"Come on," he ejaculated impatiently. "Hop in! We've got to get back and be hoisted in. Who won the Light-Weights by the same token?"

"Billy did," replied Harcourt. He settled himself comfortably on top of the cabin of the picket-boat and pulled up the collar of his great-coat about his face.

Morton jerked the engine-room telegraph and the boat moved off.

"Why are we in such a hurry?" queried Harcourt. "Are we going out?"

The boyish figure at the helm glanced aft to see

his stern was clear, and put the wheel over, heading the boat in the direction of their ship.

"Yes," he said. "At least a signal has just come through ordering us to raise steam for working cables at seven p.m."

Lettigne, perched beside Mordaunt on the other side of the cabin-top, leaned across. The crowded excitements of the afternoon had lapsed into oblivion.

"D'you mean the whole Fleet, or only just us?" he asked.

"The whole Fleet," replied Morton, staring ahead between the twin funnels of his boat. "I suppose it's the usual weary stunt; go out and steam about trailing the tail of our coat for a couple of days, and then come back again." The speaker gripped the spokes of the wheel almost savagely. "Lord!" he added, "if only they'd come out. . . . ."

Mordaunt fingered his nose gingerly. "They do come out occasionally, I believe. You'd think their women 'ud boo them out. . . . They sneak about behind their minefields and do exercises, and they cover their Battle-cruisers when they nip out for a tip-and-run bombardment of one of our watering-places. But we'll never catch 'em, although we can stop them from being of the smallest use to Germany by just being where we are."

"We could catch them if they didn't know we were coming South," said another Midshipman perched beside Mordaunt with his knees under his chin.

"But they always do know," said Harcourt over his shoulder. "Their Zepps always see us coming and give them the tip to nip off home!"

"Fog . . ." said Mordaunt musingly.

"Yes," said another who had not hitherto spoken. "That 'ud do it all right. But then you couldn't see to hit 'em. 'Sides, you can't count on a fog coming on just when you want it."

"Well," said Morton, with the air of one who was wearied by profitless discussion. "Fog or no fog, I only hope they come out this time."

He rang down "Slow" to the tiny engine-room underneath his feet, and spun the wheel to bring the crowded boat alongside the port gangway.

A Fleet proceeds to sea in War-time with little or no outward circumstance. There was no apparent increase of activity onboard the great fighting "townships" even on the eve of departure. As the late afternoon wore on the Signal Department onboard the Fleet Flagship was busy for a space, and the daylight signalling searchlights splashed and spluttered while hoist after hoist of flags leaped from the signal platform to yardarm or masthead; and ever as they descended fresh successive tangles climbed to take their place. But after a while even this ceased, and the Flagships of the squadrons, who had been taking it all in, nodded sagely, as it were, and turned round to repeat for the benefit of the

ships of their individual squadrons such portions as they required for their guidance.

Then from their hidden anchorage the Destroyers moved past on their way out, flotilla after flotilla in a dark, snake-like procession, swift, silent, mysterious, and a little later the Cruisers and Light Cruisers crept out in the failing light to take up their distant positions. On each high forecastle the minute figures of men were visible moving about the crawling cables, and from the funnels a slight increased haze of smoke trembled upwards like the breath of war-horses in a frosty landscape.

One by one the dripping anchors hove in sight. The water under the sterns of the Battleships was convulsed by whirling vortices as the great steel-shod bulks turned cautiously towards the entrance, like partners revolving in some solemn gigantic minuet. The dusk was fast closing down, but a saffron bar of light in the West still limned the dark outlines of the far-off hills. One by one the majestic fighting ships moved into their allotted places in the line, and presently

"Enormous, certain, slow . . ."

the lines began to move in succession towards the entrance and the open sea.

The light died out of the western sky altogether, and like great grey shadows the last of the Battle-squadrons melted into the mystery of the night.

CHAPTER IX

"Sweethearts and Wives"

BETTY finished her breakfast very slowly; she had dawdled over it, not because there was anything wrong with her appetite, but because the days were long and meals made a sort of break in the monotony. She rose from the table at length and walked to the open casement window; a cat, curled up on the rug in front of the small wood fire, opened one eye and blinked contemplatively at the slim figure in the silk shirt, the short brown tweed skirt above the brown-stockinged ankles, and finally at the neat brogues, one of which was tapping meditatively on the carpet. Then he closed his eyes again.

"Would it be to-day?" wondered Betty for about the thousandth time in the last eight days. She stared out across the little garden, the broad stretch of pasture beyond the dusty road that ended in a confused fringe of trees bordering the blue waters of the Firth. A flotilla of Destroyers that had been lying at anchor overnight had slipped from their buoys and were slowly circling towards the distant entrance to the harbour. Beyond the Firth the hills rose again, vividly green and crowned with trees.

A thrush in the unseen kitchen garden round a

corner of the cottage rehearsed a few bars of his spring song.

"It might be to-day," he sang. "It might, it might, it might—or it mightn't!" He stopped abruptly.

Eight days had passed somehow since an enigmatic telegram from the India-rubber Man had brought Betty flying up to Scotland with hastily packed trunks and a singing heart.

Somehow she had expected him to meet her at the little station she reached about noon after an all-night journey of incredible discomforts. But no India-rubber Man had been there to welcome her; instead a pretty girl with hair of a rusty gold, a year or two her senior, had come forward rather shyly and greeted her.

"Are you Mrs. Standish?" she asked, smiling.

Despite the six-months-old wedding ring on her hand, Betty experienced a faint jolt of surprise at hearing herself thus addressed.

"Yes," she said, and glanced half-expectantly up and down the platform. "I hoped my husband would be here. . . ."

The stranger shook her head. "I'm afraid his squadron hasn't come in yet," she said, and added reassuringly, "but it won't be long now. Your sister wrote and told me you were coming up. My name's Etta Clavering. . . ."

"Oh, thank you," said Betty. "You got me rooms, didn't you—and I'm so grateful to you."

"Not at all," said the other. "It's rather a job getting them as a rule, but these just happened to be vacant. Rather nice ones: nice woman, too. No bath, of course, but up here you get used to tubbing in your basin, and—and little things like that. But everything's nice and clean, and that's more than some of the places are." They had sorted out Betty's luggage while Mrs. Clavering was talking, and left it with the porter to bring on. "We can walk," said Betty's guide. "It's quite close, and I expect you won't be sorry to stretch your legs."

They skirted a little village of grey stone cottages straggling on either side of a broad street towards a wooded glen, down which a river wound brawling to join the waters of the Firth. Cottages and little shops alternated, and half-way up the street a rather more pretentious hotel of quarried stone rose above the level of the roofs. Hills formed a background to the whole, with clumps of dark fir clinging to the steep slopes, and in the far distance snow-capped mountains stood like pale opals against the blue sky. The air was keen and invigorating, and little clouds like a flock of sheep drifted overhead.

Mrs. Clavering led the way past the village towards a neat row of cottages on the brow of a little hill about a quarter of a mile behind it, and as they ascended a steep lane she turned and pointed with her ashplant. A confusion of chimneys, cranes and wharves were shrouded in a haze of smoke and the kindly distance.

"You see," she said, "you can almost see the harbour from your house. That's where the ships lie when they come in here. This is your abode. They'll send your luggage up presently. I hope you'll be comfortable. No, I won't come in now. I expect you're tired after travelling all night. You must come and have tea with me, and meet some of the others." She laughed and turned to descend the hill, stopping again a few paces down to wave a friendly stick.

Etta Clavering occupied a low-ceilinged room above a baker's shop in the village, and had strewn it about with books and photographs and nick-nacks until the drab surroundings seemed to reflect a little of her dainty personality. Thither, later in the day, she took Betty off to tea and introduced her to a tall fair girl with abundant hair and a gentle, rippling laugh that had in it the quality of running water.

"We belong to the same squadron," she said. "I'm glad we've met now, because directly our husbands' ships come in we shall never see each other!" She turned to Etta Clavering. "It's like that up here, isn't it? We sit in each other's laps all day till our husbands arrive, and then we simply can't waste a minute to be civil . . . !"

She laughed her soft ripple of amusement, cut short by the entrance of another visitor. She was older than the other three: a sweet, rather grave-faced woman with patient eyes that looked as if they had watched and waited through a great many loneli-

nesses. There was something tender, almost protecting, in her smile as she greeted Betty.

"You have only just come North, haven't you?" she asked. "The latest recruit to our army of—waiters, I was going to say, but it sounds silly. Waitresses hardly seems right either, does it? Anyhow, I hope you won't have to wait for very long."

"I hope not," said Betty, a trifle forlornly.

"So do I," said the tall fair girl whose name was Eileen Cavendish. "I am developing an actual liver out of sheer jealousy of some of these women whose husbands are on leave. When Bill comes I shall hang on his arm in my best 'clinging-ivy-and-the-oak' style, and walk him up and down outside the hateful creatures' windows! It'll be *their* turn to gnash their teeth then!"

Betty joined in the laughter. "Are there many of—of Us up here?" she asked.

"There are as many as the village will hold, and every farm and byre and cow-shed for about six miles round," replied Mrs. Gascoigne, the new-comer. "And, of course, the little town, about four miles from here, near where the ships anchor, simply couldn't hold another wife if you tried to lever one in with a shoe-horn!"

"And then," continued their hostess, measuring out the tea into the pot, "of course, there are some selfish brutes who stay on all the time—I'm one of them," she added pathetically. "But it's no use being a hypocrite about it. I'd stay on if they all put

me in Coventry and I had to pawn my wedding ring to pay for my rooms. One feels nearer, somehow. . . . Do sit down all of you. There's nothing to eat except scones and jam, but the tea is nice and hot, and considering I bought it at that little shop near the manse, it looks and smells very like real tea."

"I suppose, then, all the rooms are dreadfully expensive," said Betty.

"Expensive!" echoed the fair girl, consuming her buttered scone with frank enjoyment. "You could live at the Ritz or Waldorf a good deal cheaper than in some of these crofter's cottages. You see, until the War began they never let anything in their lives. No one ever wanted to come and live here. Of course, there are nice women—like your Miss McCallum, for example—who won't take advantage of the enormous demand, and stick to reasonable prices. More honour to them! But if you could see some of the hovels for which they are demanding six and seven guineas a week—and, what's more, getting it. . . ."

"I'm afraid we are giving Mrs. Standish an altogether rather gloomy picture of the place," said Mrs. Gascoigne. She turned to Betty with a reassuring smile. "You don't have to pay anything to be out of doors," she said. "That much is free, even here; it's perfectly delightful country, and when the weather improves a bit we have picnics and walks and even do a little fishing in an amateurish sort of way. It all helps to pass the time. . . ."

"But it's not only the prices that turn one's hair grey up here," continued Mrs. Cavendish. "That little Mrs. Thatcher—her husband is in a Destroyer or something—told me that her landlady has false teeth. . . ." The speaker extended a slender forefinger, to which she imparted a little wriggling motion. "They wobble . . . like that—when she talks. She always talks when she brings in meals. . . . I suppose it's funny, really——" She lapsed into her liquid giggle. "But poor Mrs. Thatcher nearly cried when she told me about it. Imagine! Week in, week out. Every meal . . . and trying not to look . . . ! She said it made her want to scream."

"I should certainly scream," said Mrs. Gascoigne, who had finished her tea and was preparing to take her departure. "Now I must be off. I've promised to go and sit with Mrs. Daubney. She's laid up, poor thing, and it's so dull for her all alone in those stuffy rooms." She held out her hand to Betty. "I hope we shall see a lot more of each other," she said prettily. "We're going to show you some of the walks round here, and we'll take our tea out to the woods. . . . I hope you'll be happy up here."

The door closed behind her, and Eileen Cavendish explored the room in search of cigarettes. "Sybil Gascoigne is a dear," she observed.

"On the little table, there," said the hostess. "In that box. Do you smoke, Mrs. Standish?" Mrs. Standish, it appeared, did not. "Throw me one, Eileen." She caught and lit it with an almost mas-

culine neatness. "Yes," she continued, "she's perfectly sweet. Her husband is a senior Post-captain, and there isn't an atom of 'side' or snobbishness in her composition. She is just as sweet to that hopelessly dull and dreary Daubney woman as she is to—well, to charming and well-bred attractions like ourselves!" The speaker laughingly blew a cloud of smoke and turned to Betty. "In a sense, this war has done us good. You've never lived in a Dockyard Port, though. You don't know the insane snobberies and the ludicrous little castes that flourished in pre-war days."

"I dare say you're right," said Eileen Cavendish. She moved idly about the room examining photographs and puffing her cigarette. "But even the War isn't going to make me fall on the neck of a woman I don't like. But I'm talking like a cat. It's not seeing Bill for so long. . . ."

Mrs. Clavering smiled. "No," she said, "I agree there are limits. But up here, what does it matter if a woman's husband is an Engineer or a Paymaster or a Commander or only an impecunious Lieutenant like mine—as long as she is nice? Yet if it weren't for people like Sybil Gascoigne we should all be clinging to our ridiculous little pre-war sets, and talking of branches and seniority till we died of loneliness and boredom with our aristocratic noses in the air. . . . As it is, I don't believe even Sybil Gascoigne could have done it if she hadn't been the Honourable Mrs. Gascoigne. That carried her over

some pretty rough ground, childish though it sounds."

"Bong Song!" interposed Mrs. Cavendish flippantly. "As——" She broke off abruptly. "There I go again! There's no doubt about it: I *have* got a liver . . . I think I'll go home and write to Bill. That always does me good."

That tea-party was the first of many similar informal gatherings of grass-widows in poky rooms and cottage parlours. They were quite young for the most part, and many were pretty. They drank each other's tea and talked about their husbands and the price of things, and occasionally of happenings in an incredibly remote past when one hunted and went to dances and bought pretty frocks.

It was Etta Clavering who conducted Betty round the village shops on the morning after her arrival, where she was introduced to the small Scottish shopkeeper getting rich quick, and the unedifying revelation of naked greed cringing behind every tiny counter.

Through Eileen Cavendish, moreover, she secured the goodwill of a washerwoman.

"My dear," said her benefactress, "money won't tempt them. They've got beyond that. They've got to like you before they will wring out a stocking for you. But I'll take you to the Widow Twankey; I'm one of her protégées, and she shows her affection for me by feeling for my ribs with her first two fingers to punctuate her remarks with prods. It

always makes me hysterical. She has only got two teeth, and they don't meet."

So the Widow Twankey was sought out, and Betty stood and looked appealingly humble while Etta Cavendish suffered her ribs to be prodded in a good cause, and the Widow agreed to "wash for" Betty at rates that would have brought blushes to the cheeks of a Parisian *blanchisseuse de fin.*

With Mrs. Gascoigne, Betty explored the heathery moors where the distraught pee-wits were already nesting, and the cool, clean air blew down from the snowy Grampians, bracing the walkers like a draught of iced wine. They even climbed some of the nearer hills, forcing their way through the tangled spruce-branches and undergrowth to the summit, from where the distant North Sea itself was visible, lying like a grey menace to their peace.

They would return from these expeditions by the path down the glen that wound close to the brawling river; here, in the evenings, sometimes with an unexpectedness embarrassing to both parties, they met some of the reunited couples whom Eileen Cavendish found it hard to contemplate unmoved; occasionally the fingers of such couples were interlaced, and they talked very earnestly as they walked.

On fine days the husbandless wives organised picnics and boiled the kettle over a fire of twigs. On these occasions the arrangements were generally in the hands of a fat, jolly woman everyone called "Mrs. Pat." She it was who chose the site, built the fire with

gipsy cunning, and cut the forked sticks on which the kettle hung. The meal over, Mrs. Pat would produce a blackened cigarette holder and sit and smoke with reflective enjoyment while she translated the rustling, furtive sounds of life in brake and hedgerow around them for the benefit of anyone who cared to listen. No one knew whence she had acquired such mysterious completeness of knowledge. It was as if an invisible side of her walked hand in hand with Nature; sap oozing from a bursting bud, laden bee or fallen feather, each was to Mrs. Pat the chapter of a vast romance: and if she bored anyone with her interpretation of it, they had only got to get up and go for a walk.

She had a niece staying with her, the fiancée of a Lieutenant in her husband's ship, a slim thing with blue eyes and a hint of the Overseas in the lazy, unstudied grace of her movements. She spoke sparingly, and listened to the conversation of the others with her eyes always on the distant grey shadow that was the sea. Thus the days passed.

In the evenings Betty read or knitted and inveigled her stout, kindly landlady into gossip on the threshold while she cleared away the evening meal, and so the morning of the ninth day found Betty staring out of her window, listening for the thrush to begin again its haunting, unfinished song.

An object moving rapidly along the top of the hedge that skirted the lane leading to the cottage caught her eye; she watched it until the hedge termi-

nated, when it resolved itself into the top of Eileen Cavendish's hat. Her pretty face was pink with exertion and excitement, and she moved at a gait suggestive of both running and walking.

Betty greeted her at the gateway of her little garden, and her heart quickened as she ran to meet the bearer of tidings.

"My dear," gasped Mrs. Cavendish, "they're coming in this morning. Mrs. Monro—that's my landlady—has a brother in the town: I forget what he does there, but he *always* knows.

For an instant the colour ebbed from Betty's cheeks, and then her beating heart sent it surging back again.

"But——" she said. "Does that mean that *our* squadron is coming in?"

"Of course it does, silly! Get your hat quick, and we'll climb up to the top of the hill and see if we can get a glimpse of them coming in. You'll have plenty of time to get down again and powder your nose before your Bunje-man, or whatever you call him, can get ashore. Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!"

Together they toiled up the hill to the high stretch of moorland from which a view of the entrance to the Firth could be obtained.

"This is where I always come," said Eileen Cavendish. She stopped and panted for breath. "Ouf! I'm getting fat and short-winded. How long is it since you've seen your husband?"

Betty considered. "Three months and seventeen days," was the reply.

Her companion nodded.

"It's rotten, isn't it? But now—at times like this, I almost feel as if it's—worth it, I was going to say; but I suppose it's hardly that. I always vowed I'd never marry a sailor, and ever since I did I've felt sorry for all the women with other kinds of husbands. . . . Bill *is* such a dear!"

They found seats in the lee of a stack of peat and sat down side by side to watch the distant entrance. A faint grey haze beyond the headlands on either side of the mouth of the harbour held the outer sea in mystery.

"There's nothing in sight," said Betty.

"No," said the other, "but there will be presently. You wait." She put her elbows on her knees and rested her face in the cup of her two hands. "You haven't got used to waiting yet," she continued. "It seems to have made up half my life since I met Bill. I had a little daughter once, and it didn't matter so much then. . . . But she died, the mite . . ."

No Battleships had emerged from the blue-grey curtain of the mist when lunch-time came; nothing moved across the surface of the empty harbour, and they descended the hill to share the meal in Betty's room.

"Perhaps they won't be in till after tea," suggested Betty. "Perhaps the fog has delayed them."

"Perhaps," said the other.

So they put tea in a Thermos flask, and bread-and-butter and a slice of cake apiece in a little basket, and climbed again to their vantage point in the lee of the peat stack. They read novels and talked in desultory snatches through the afternoon. Then they had tea and told each other about the books they were reading. But as their shadows lengthened across the blaeberry and heather, the silences grew longer, and Betty, striving to concentrate her interest on her book, found the page grow suddenly blurred and incomprehensible. . . .

"It's getting chilly," said the elder girl at length. She rose to her feet with a little involuntary shiver, and stood for a moment staring out towards the sea. "I wonder . . ." she began, and her voice trailed off into silence.

Betty began slowly to repack the basket.

"Sometimes I pray," said Eileen Cavendish, "when I want things to happen very much. And sometimes I just hold my thumbs like a pagan. Sometimes I do both. Let's do both now."

So they sat silent side by side; one held her breath and the other held her thumbs, but only the dusk crept in from the sea.

CHAPTER X

The Battle of the Mist

THOROGOOD, Lieutenant of the Afternoon Watch, climbed the ladder to the upper bridge as the bell struck the half-hour after noon. A blue worsted muffler, gift and handiwork of an aunt on the outbreak of war, enfolded his neck. He wore a pair of glasses in a case slung over one shoulder and black leather gauntlet-gloves.

The Officer of the Forenoon Watch, known among his messmates as Tweedledee, was focusing the range-finder on the ship ahead of them in the line; he looked round as the new-comer appeared, and greeted him with a grin.

"Hullo, James," he said. "Your afternoon watch? Well, here you are." He made a comprehensive gesture embracing the vast Fleet that was spread out over the waters as far as the eye could reach.

"Divisions in line ahead, columns disposed abeam, course S.E. Speed, 15 knots. Glass low and steady. The Cruisers are ahead there, beyond the Destroyers," he nodded ahead. "But you can't see them because of the mist. The Battle-cruisers are somewhere beyond them again, with their Light

Cruisers and Destroyers—about thirty miles to the southward. The hands are at dinner and all is peace. She's keeping station quite well now." The speaker moved to the range-finder again and peered into it at the next ahead. "Right to a yard, James."

Thorogood nodded. "Thank you: I hope I'll succeed in keeping her there. Any news?"

"News?" The other laughed. "What about?"

"Well," replied Thorogood, "the perishing Hun, let's say."

The Navigator thoughtfully biting the end of a pencil, came out of the chart-house with a note-book in his hand, in which he had been working out the noon reckoning.

"Pilot," said the departing Officer of the Forenoon Watch, "James is thirsting for news of the enemy."

"Optimist!" replied the Navigator composedly. "News, indeed! This isn't Wolff's Agency, my lad. This is a Cook's tour of the North Sea." He sniffed the damp, salt breeze. "Bracing air, change of scenery: no undue excitement—sort of rest cure, in fact. And you come along exhibiting a morbid craving for excitement."

"I know," said Thorogood meekly. "It's the effect of going to the cinematograph. All the magistrates are talking about it. They say Charlie Chaplin's got something to do with it. I suppose, though, there's no objection to my asking what the disposition of our Light Cruisers happens to be, is there? It's

prompted more by a healthy desire to improve my knowledge before I take over the afternoon watch than anything else."

"They're out on the starboard quarter," replied the late Officer of the Watch. "You can't see them because of this cursed mist, but they're there."

"Strikes me this afternoon watch is going to be more of a faith cure than a rest cure as the Pilot suggests," grumbled Thorogood. "Battle-cruisers somewhere ahead, Cruisers invisible in the mist, Light Cruisers——"

The report of a gun, followed almost instantly by a loud explosion, came from far away on the port bow. A Destroyer that had altered course was resuming her position in the Destroyer line on the outskirts of the Fleet. A distant column of smoke and spray was slowly dissolving into the North Sea haze.

At the report of the gun the three men raised their glasses to stare in the direction of the sound. "Only one of the Huns' floating mines," said the Navigator. "She exploded it with her 3-pounder. Pretty shot."

"Well," said Tweedledee, "I can't stay here all day. Anything else you want to know, James? What's for lunch? I'm devilish hungry."

"Boiled beef and carrots," replied Thorogood. "*Mit* apple tart and cream: the Messman can't be well. Pills says its squando-mania. No, I don't

think I want to know any more. I suppose the log's written up?"

"It is. Now for the boiled beef, and this afternoon Little Bright-eyes is going to get his head down and have a nice sleep."

The speaker prepared to depart.

"Hold on," said the Navigator. "I'm coming with you. I've just got to give the noon position to the Owner on the way."

They descended the ladder together, and left Thorogood alone on the platform.

The Battle-fleet was steaming in parallel lines about a mile apart, each Squadron in the wake of its Flagship. The Destroyers, strung out on either flank of the Battle-fleet, were rolling steadily in the long, smooth swell, leaving a smear of smoke in their trail. Far away in the mist astern flickered a very bright light: the invisible Light Cruisers must be there, reflected Thorogood, and presently from the Fleet Flagship came a succession of answering blinks. The light stopped flickering out of the mist.

The speed at which the Fleet was travelling sent the wind thrumming through the halliards and funnel stays and past Thorogood's ears with a little whistling noise; otherwise few sounds reached him at the altitude at which he stood. On the signal-platform below, a number of signalmen were grouped round the flag-lockers with the halliards in their hands in instant readiness to hoist a signal. The Signal Boatswain had steadied his glass against a semaphore, and

was studying something on the misty outskirts of the Fleet. The Quartermaster at the wheel was watching the compass card with a silent intensity that made his face look as if it had been carved in bronze. The telegraph-men maintained a conversation that was pitched in a low, deep note inaudible two yards away. It concerned the photograph of a mutual lady acquaintance, and has no place in this narrative.

Thorogood moved to the rail and looked down at the familiar forecastle and teeming upper-deck, thirty feet below. Seen thus from above, the grey, sloping shields of the turrets, each with its great twin guns, looked like gigantic mythical tortoises with two heads and disproportionately long necks. It was the dinner hour, and men were moving about, walking up and down, or sitting about in little groups smoking. Some were playing cards in places sheltered from the wind and spray; near the blacksmith's forge a man was stooping patiently over a small black object: Thorogood raised his glasses for a moment and recognised the ship's cat, reluctantly undergoing instruction in jumping through the man's hands.

The cooks of the Messes were wending their way in procession to the chutes at the ship's sides, carrying mess-kettles containing scraps and slops from the mess-deck dinner. For an instant the Officer of the Watch, looking down from that altitude and cut off from all sounds but that of the wind, experienced a feeling of unfamiliar detachment from the pulsating mass of metal beneath his feet. He had a vision

of the electric-lit interior of the great ship, deck beneath deck, with men everywhere. Men rolled up in coats and oilskins, snatching half-an-hour's sleep along the crowded gun-batteries, men writing letters to sweethearts and wives, men laughing and quarreling, or singing low-toned, melancholy ditties as they mended worn garments: hundreds and hundreds of reasoning human entities were crowded in those steel-walled spaces, each with his boundless hopes and affections, his separate fears and vices and conceptions of the Deity, and his small, incommunicable distresses. . . .

Beneath all that again, far below the surface of the grey North Sea, were men, moving about purring turbines and dynamos and webs of stupendous machinery, silently oiling, testing and adjusting a thousand moving joints of metal. There were adjoining caverns lit by the glare of furnaces that shone red on the glistening faces of men, silent vaults and passages where the projectiles were ranged in sinister array, and chilly spaces in which the electric light was reflected from the burnished and oiled torpedoes that hung in readiness above the submerged tubes.

Thorogood raised his eyes and stared out across the vast array of the Battle-fleet. Obedient to the message flashed from the Flagship a few minutes earlier, the Light Cruisers that had been invisible on the quarter now emerged from behind the curtain of the mist and were rapidly moving up to a new posi-

tion. Presently the same mysterious, soundless voice spoke again:

YOU ARE MAKING TOO MUCH SMOKE

blinked the glittering searchlight, and anon in the stokeholds of the end ship of the lee line there was the stokehold equivalent for weeping and wailing and the gnashing of teeth. . . .

For a couple of hours the Fleet surged onwards in silence and unchanged formation. The swift Light Cruisers had overtaken the advancing Battle-fleet, and vanished like wraiths into the haze ahead. The Captain and the Navigator had joined Thorogood on the bridge, and were poring over the chart and talking in low voices. The Midshipman of the Watch stood with eyes glued to the range-finder, turning his head at intervals to report the distance of the next ahead to the Officer of the Watch.

A messenger from the Coding Officer tumbled pell-mell up the ladder and handed a piece of folded paper to the Captain, saluted, turned on his heel and descended the ladder again. The Captain unfolded the signal and read with knitted brows. Then he turned quickly to the chart again.

For a moment he was busy with dividers and parallel-rulers; when he raised his head his eyes were alight with a curiously restrained excitement.

"Rather interesting," he said, and passed the paper to the Navigator, who read it in turn and grinned like a schoolboy.

"They have probably caught a raiding party in the mist, sir," he said, and bent over the chart.

Thorogood picked up the message and pursed his lips up in a short, soundless whistle.

"It's too much to hope that their main fleet's out," he said.

"Their main fleet's sure to be in support somewhere," replied the Captain. "It's a question whether they realise we're all down on top of 'em, though, and nip for home before we catch them."

A second messenger flung himself, panting, up the ladder, and handed in a second message.

"Intercepted wireless to Flag, sir."

The Captain read it and took a breath that was like a sigh of relief. "At last!" he said.

The Navigator turned from the chart.

"*Der Tag*, sir?" he asked interrogatively with a smile.

The Captain nodded ahead at the haze curtaining all the horizon. "If we catch 'em," he replied.

The signal platform was awhirl with bunting; the voice of the Chief Yeoman repeating hoists rose above the stamp of feet and the flapping of flags in the wind.

Thorogood turned to the Navigator. "Will you take on now?" he asked in a low voice. "If the balloon's really going up this time I'd better get along to my battery."

As he descended the ladder the upper-deck was ringing with bugle-calls, and the turrets' crews were

already swarming round their guns. From the hatchways leading to the lower-deck came a great roar of cheering. Men poured up on their way to their action stations in a laughing, rejoicing throng. Mouldy Jakes, with the ever-faithful Midshipman of his turret at his side, was hurrying to his beloved guns, and greeted Thorogood as he passed with a sidelong jerk of the head and the first whole-souled smile of enjoyment a mess-mate had ever surprised on his face. Further aft the Captain of Marines was standing on the roof of his slowly revolving turret:

"Buck up, James," he shouted merrily. "'Johnnie, get your gun, there's a cat in the garden'—We're going to see Life in a minute, my lad!"

He was right, but they were also destined to see Death, holding red carnival.

Thorogood waved his arm and shouted an inarticulate reply as he ran aft to the hatchway leading to the cabin flat. Officers were rushing past on their way to their posts, exchanging chaff and conjecture as they went. Thorogood descended to the cabin flat, jerked back the curtain of his cabin, and hurriedly entered the familiar apartment. Opening a drawer he snatched up a gas-mask and a packet containing first-aid appliances which he thrust into the pocket of his swimming waistcoat, together with a flask and a small tin of compressed meat lozenges. Once before, earlier in the war, he had fought for life clinging to a floating spar. Then succour had

come in a comparatively short time, but the experience had not been without its lesson.

He made for the door again and then paused on the threshold hesitatingly. "Might as well," he said, and turning back picked up a small photograph in a folding morocco frame and thrust it half-shamefacedly into an inside pocket.

As he emerged into the flat again he met Gerrard, the Assistant Paymaster, struggling into a thick coat outside the door of his cabin.

"Hullo!" laughed the A.P. "Having a last look at the old home, James?"

Thorogood patted his pockets. "Just taking in provisions in case I have to spend the week-end on a raft. What's your action station?"

"Fore-top," was the reply. "Taking notes of the action. Now, have I got everything? Thermos flask—watch—note-book—glasses—right! *En avant, mon brave!*"

Thorogood reached the 6-inch battery breathless, and found the guns' crews busy tricing up their mess-tables overhead. The Gunner was passing along the crowded deck ahead of him. He stopped opposite the after gun:

"They're out, lads!" he said grimly. "Give 'em hell, this time. Clear away and close up round your guns—smartly then, my hearties!"

From the other side of the deck came the voice of Tweedledee giving orders to his battery, raised above the clatter of the ammunition hoists, the thud

of projectiles as they were placed in the rear of each gun, the snap and clang of the breech as the guns were loaded. . . .

Fire and wreckage parties stood in little groups along the main-deck, and first-aid parties were gathered at the hatchways; two Midshipmen, pale and bright-eyed with excitement, talked in low voices by the foremost gun: gradually a tense hush closed down upon the main deck; the crews stood silent round their guns, waiting in their steel-walled casemates for the signal that would galvanise them into death-dealing activity against the invisible foe.

Ultimate victory no man doubted: death might sweep, swift and shattering, along these electric-lit enclosed spaces where they stood waiting; the great ship was being driven headlong by unseen forces towards an unseen foe. But of that foe, none of the hundreds of men between decks save the straining gunlayers with their eyes at the sighting telescopes would ever catch a single glimpse.

The silence was riven by a roaring concussion that seemed to shake the framework of the ship. The great turret guns on the upper deck had opened fire with a salvo, and, as if released by the explosion, a burst of frantic cheering leaped from every throat and echoed and reverberated along the decks. Somewhere in the outside world of mist and sea, under the grey Northern sky, the Battle-Fleet action had begun.

* * * * *

The fore-top was a semi-circular eyrie, roofed

and walled with steel, that projected from the fore topmast some distance above the giant tripod. It was reached by iron rungs let into the mast, and here Gerrard, with the din of bugles and the cheering still ringing in his ears, joined the assembled officers and men whose station it was in action.

From that dizzy elevation it was possible to take in the disposition of the vast Fleet at a single glance. It was like looking down on model ships spread out over a grey carpet preparatory to a children's game. A white flicker of foam at each blunt ram and the wind singing past the hooded top alone gave any indication of the speed at which the ships were advancing. It was an immense monochrome of grey. Grey ships with the White Ensign flying free on each: grey sea flecked here and there by the diverging bow-waves breaking as they met: a grey sky along which the smoke trailed sullenly and gathered in a dense, low-lying cloud that mingled with the haze astern.

The Lieutenant in the top drew Gerrard to his side. "Put your head down here," he said, "out of the wind . . . can you hear?" There was a queer ring of exultation in his voice. "Guns!"

Gerrard bent down and strained all his faculties to listen. For a moment he heard nothing but the hum of the wind and the vibration of the engines transmitted by the mast. Then, faint and intermittent, like the far-off grumble of a gathering thunderstorm, his ears caught a sound that sent all his pulses hammering.

"Thank God I've lived to hear that noise!" muttered the Lieutenant. He straightened up, staring ahead through his glasses in the direction of the invisible fight.

For a while no one spoke. The tense minutes dragged by as the sounds of firing grew momentarily more distinct. The uncertain outline of the near horizon was punctuated by vivid flashes of flame from the guns of the approaching enemy. They were still hidden by the mist and apparently unconscious of the Battle-Fleet bearing down upon them like some vast, implacable instrument of doom. The target of their guns suddenly became visible as the Battle-cruisers appeared on the starboard bow, moving rapidly across the limit of vision like a line of grey phantoms spitting fire and destruction as they went. Misty columns of foam that leaped up from the water all about them showed that they were under heavy fire.

The Battle-Fleet was deploying into Line of Battle, Squadron forming up astern of Squadron in a single line of mailed monsters extending far into the haze that was momentarily closing in upon them. The curtain ahead was again pierced by a retreating force of Cruisers beaten back on the protection of the Battle-Fleet and ringed by leaping waterspouts as the enemy's salvos pursued them.

As yet the enemy were invisible, but when the last ship swung into deployment the mist cleared for a moment and disclosed them amid a cloud of smoke and the furious flashes of guns. The moment had

come, and all along the extended British battle-line the turret guns opened fire with a roar of angry sound that seemed to split the grey vault of heaven. As if to mock them in that supreme instant the mist swirled across again and hid the German Fleet wheeling round in panic flight.

The gases belched from the muzzles of the guns, together with the smoke of hundreds of funnels caught and held by the encircling mist, reeled to and fro across the spouting water and mingled with the grey clouds from bursting shell. Through it all the two Fleets, the pursuing and the pursued, grappled in blindfold headlong fury.

Thorogood's battery was on the disengaged side of the ship during the earlier phases of the action. Across the deck they heard the guns of Tweedledee's battery open fire with a roar, and then the cheering of the crews, mingled with the cordite fumes, was drowned by an ear-splitting detonation in the confined spaces of the mess deck, followed by a blinding flash of light.

Tweedledee was flung from where he was standing to pitch brokenly at the foot of the hatchway, like a rag doll flung down by a child in a passion. He lay outstretched, face downwards, with his head resting on his forearm as if asleep. Most of the lights had been extinguished by the explosion, but a pile of cartridges in the rear of one of the guns had caught fire and burned fiercely, illuminating everything with a yellow glare.

Lettigne, Midshipman of the battery, was untouched; deafened and deathly sick he took command of the remaining guns. He, who ten seconds before had never even seen death, was slithering about dimly lit decks, slippery with what he dared not look at, encouraging and steadying the crews, and helping to extinguish the burning cordite. In darkened corners, where they had been thrown by the explosion, men were groaning and dying. . . .

That shell had been one of several that had struck the ship simultaneously. Mouldy Jakes opened his eyes to see a streak of light showing through a jagged rip in a bulkhead. The light was red and hurt his eyes: he passed his hand across his face, and it was wet with a warm stickiness. His vision cleared, however, and for a few moments he studied the drops of water that were dripping from the gash in the plating. "Crying!" he said stupidly. The shells that pitched short had deluged the fore-part of the ship with water, and it was still dripping into the interior of the turret. Mouldy Jakes raised his head, and a yard or two away saw Morton. The breech of one of the guns was open, and Morton was lying limply over the huge breech-block. The machinery was smashed and twisted, and mixed up with it were dead men and bits of men. . . .

A little while later the Fleet Surgeon, splashed with red to the elbows, glanced up from his work in the fore-distributing station and saw a strange figure descending the hatchway. It was Mouldy Jakes:

his scalp was torn so that a red triangular patch hung rakishly over one eye. Flung over his shoulder was the limp form of an unconscious Midshipman. For a moment he stood swaying, steadying himself with outstetched hand against the rail of the ladder.

"Thought I'd better bring him along," he gasped. "Turret's knocked to hell. . . . He's still alive, but he's broken all to little bits inside . . . I can feel him. . . . Morton, snottie of my turret . . ."

Sickberth Stewards relieved him of his burden, and Mouldy Jakes sat down on the bottom rung of the ladder and began to whimper like a distraught child. "It's my hand . . ." he said plaintively, and extended a trembling, shattered palm. "I've only just noticed it."

With his eye glued to the periscope of his turret the India-rubber Man was fidgeting and swearing softly under his breath at the exasperating treachery of the fog. The great guns under his control roared at intervals, but before the effect of the shell-burst could be observed the enemy would be swallowed from sight. Once, at the commencement of the action, he thought of Betty; he thought of her tenderly and reverently, and then put her out of his mind. . . .

Lanes of unexpected visibility opened while an eyelid winked, and disclosed a score of desperate fights passing and reappearing like scenes upon a screen. A German Battleship, near and quite distinct, was in

sight for a moment, listing slowly over with her guns pointing upwards like the fingers ofa distraught hand, and as she sank the mist closed down again as it were a merciful curtain drawn to hide a horror. An enemy Cruiser dropped down the engaged side of the line like an exhausted participator in a Bacchanal of Furies. Her sides were riven and gaping, with a red glare showing through the rents. Her decks were a ruined shambles of blackened, twisted metal, but she still spat defiance from a solitary gun, and sank firing as the fight swept past.

Hither and thither rolled the fog, blotting out the enemy at one moment, at another disclosing swift and awful cataclysms. A British Cruiser, dodging and zigzagging through a tempest of shells, blew up. She changed on the instant into a column of black smoke and wreckage that leaped up into the outraged sky; it trembled there like a dark monument to the futile hate of man for his brother man and slowly dissolved into the mist. A German Destroyer attack crumpled up in the blast of the 6-inch batteries of the British Fleet, and the British Destroyers dashed to meet their crippled onslaught as vultures might swoop on blinded wolves. They fought at point-blank range, asking no quarter, expecting none; they fought over decks ravaged by shrapnel and piled with dead. The sea was thick with floating corpses and shattered wreckage, and darkened with patches of oil that marked the grave of a rammed Submarine or sunken Destroyer. Maimed and bleeding men dragged

themselves on to rafts and cheered their comrades as they left them to their death.

Through that witches' cauldron of fog and shell-smoke the British Battle-Fleet groped for its elusive foe. One minute of perfect visibility, one little minute of clear range beyond the fog-masked sights, was all they asked to deal the death-blow that would end the fight—men prayed God for it and died with the prayer in their teeth.

But the minute never came. The firing died away down the line; the dumb guns moved blindly towards the shifting sounds of strife like monsters mouthing for the prey that was denied them, but the fog held and the merciful dusk closed down and covered the flight of the stricken German Fleet for the shelter of its protecting mine-fields.

It was not until night fell that the British Destroyers began their savage work in earnest. Flotilla after flotilla was detached from the Fleet and swallowed by the short summer night, moving swiftly and relentlessly to their appointed tasks like black panthers on the trail.

Cut off from their base by the British Fleet the scattered German squadrons dodged and doubled through the darkness, striving to elude the cordon drawn across their path. They can be pictured as towering black shadows rushing headlong through the night, with the wounded groaning between their wreckage-strewn decks: and on each bridge, high above them in the windy darkness, men talked in

guttural monosyllables, peering through high-power glasses for the menace that stalked them. . . . On the trigger of every gun there would be a twitching finger, and all the while the blackness round them would be pierced and rent by distant spurts of flame. . . .

The wind and sea had risen, and over an area of several hundred square miles of stormy sea swept the Terror by Night. Bursting starshell and questioning searchlight fought with the darkness, betraying to the guns the sinister black hulls driving through clouds of silver spray, the loaded tubes and streaming decks, the oilskin-clad figures on each bridge forcing the attack home against the devastating blast of the shrapnel. Death was abroad, berserk and blindfold. A fleeing German Cruiser fell among a flotilla of Destroyers and altered her helm, with every gun and searchlight blazing, to ram the leading boat. The Destroyer had time to alter course sufficiently to bring the two ships bow to bow before the impact came. Then there was a grinding crash: forecastle, bridge and foremost gun a pile of wreckage and struggling figures. The blast of the German guns swept the funnels, boats, cowls and men away as a gale blows dead leaves before it. Then the Cruiser swung clear and vanished into the darkness, pursued by the remainder of the Flotilla, and leaving the Destroyer reeling among the waves like a man that has been struck in the face with a knuckle-duster by a runaway thief. In the direction where the Cruiser

had disappeared five minutes later a column of flame leaped skyward, and the Flotilla, vengeance accomplished, swung off through the darkness in search of a fresh quarry.

All night long the disabled Destroyer rolled helplessly in the trough of the sea. The dawn came slowly across the sky, as if apprehensive of what it might behold on the face of the troubled waters; in the growing light the survivors of the Destroyer's crew saw a crippled German Cruiser trailing south at slow speed. Only one gun remained in action onboard the Destroyer, and round that gathered the bandaged remnant of what had once been a ship's company. They shook hands grimly among themselves and spat and girded their loins for their last fight.

The German Cruiser turned slowly over and sank while they trained the gun. . . .

A dismasted Destroyer, with riddled funnels and a foot of water swilling across the floor plates in the engine-room, bore down upon them about noon and took her crippled sister in tow. They passed slowly away to the westward, leaving the circle of grey, tumbling sea to the floating wreckage of a hundred fights and the thin keening of the gulls.

The afternoon wore on: five drenched, haggard men were laboriously propelling a life-saving raft by means of paddles in the direction of the English coast that lay some hundred odd miles to the west. The waves washed over their numbed bodies, and imparted an almost lifelike air of animation to the

corpse of a companion that lay between them, staring at the sullen sky.

Suddenly one of the paddlers stopped and pointed ahead. A boat manned by four men appeared on the crest of a wave and slid down a grey-back towards them. The oarsmen were rowing with slow strokes, and eventually the two craft passed each other within hailing distance. The men on the raft stared hard.

"'Uns!" said one. "Bloody 'Uns. . . . Strictly speakin', we did ought to fight 'em. . . . Best look 'tother way, lads!"

His companions followed his example and continued their futile mechanical paddling with averted heads.

The bow-oar of the German boat, who had a blood-stained bandage round his head, also stared.

"Engländer!" he said. *"Verdammte Schweine!"* and added, *"Fünf! . . ."* whereupon he and his companions also averted their heads, because they were four.

They passed each other thus. The waves that washed over the raft rolled the dead man's head to and fro, as if he found the situation rather preposterous.

CHAPTER XI

The Aftermath

SUCH was the Battle of the Mist, a triumphant assertion after nearly two years of vigil and waiting, of British Sea Power. It commenced with a cloud of smoke on the horizon no larger than a man's hand. Its consequences and effects spread out in widening ripples through space and time, changing the vast policies of nations, engulfing thousands of humble lives and hopes and destinies. Centuries hence the ripples will still be washing up the flotsam of that fight on the shores of human life. Long after the last survivor has passed to dust the echo of the British and German guns will rumble in ears not yet conceived. Princes will hear it in the chimes of their marriage bells; it will accompany the scratching of diplomatists' pens and the creaking wheels of the pioneers' ox-wagon. It will sound above the clatter of Baltic ship-yards and in the silence of the desert where the caravan routes stretch white beneath the moon. The Afghan, bending knife in hand over a whetstone, and the Chinese coolie knee-deep in his wet paddy-fields, will pause in their work to listen to the sound, uncomprehending, even while the dust

is gathering on the labours of the historian and the novelist. . . .

But this tale does not aspire to deal with the wide issues or significances of the war. It is an endeavour to trace the threads of certain lives a little way through a loosely-woven fabric of great events. At the conclusion there will be ends unfinished; the colours of some will have changed to grey and others will have vanished into the warp; but the design is so vast and the loom so near that we, in our day and generation, can hope to glimpse but a very little of the whole.

* * * * *

The India-rubber Man sat on the edge of the Wardroom table with his cap tilted on the back of his head, eating bread and cold bacon. The mess was illuminated by three or four candles stuck in empty saucers and placed along the table amid the débris of a meal. The dim light shone on the forms of a dozen or so of officers; some were seated at the table eating, others wandered restlessly about with food in one hand and a cup in the other. The tall, thin Lieutenant known as Tweedledum was pacing thoughtfully to and fro with a pipe in his mouth and his hands deep in his trousers pockets.

There had been little conversation. When anyone spoke it was in the dull, emotionless tones of profound fatigue. One, just out of the circle of candle-light, had pushed his plate from him on the completion of his meal, and had fallen asleep with

his head resting on his outstretched arms. The remaining faces lit by the yellow candle-light were drawn, streaked with dirt and ornamented by a twenty-four hours' growth of stubble. All wore an air of utter weariness, as of men who had passed through some soul-shaking experience.

The door opened to admit the First Lieutenant. He clumped in hastily, wearing huge leather sea-boots. Beneath his cap his head was swathed in the neat folds of bandages whose whiteness contrasted with his smoke-blackened face and singed, begrimed uniform.

"Hullo!" he said, "circuits gone here, too?" He peered round the table. "My word!" he exclaimed. "Hot tea! Who made it? The galley's a heap of wreckage." He poured himself out a cup and drank thirstily. "A-A-ah! That's grateful and comforting."

"I made it," said the Paymaster. "With my own fair hands I boiled the kettle and made tea for you all. Greater love than this has no man."

"Reminds me," said a voice out of the shadows, "that Mouldy got rather badly cut about the head and lost the best part of his left hand. He went reeling past me during the action yesterday evening with young Morton slung over his shoulder: he was staring in front of him like a man walking in his sleep."

"He was," confirmed the Paymaster. "In the execution of my office as leading hand of the first-

aid party, I gave him chloroform while the P.M.O. carved bits off him." The speaker rested his head on his hand and closed his eyes. "Next time we go into action," he continued, as if speaking to himself, "someone else can take that job on."

"What job?" asked the India-rubber Man, suddenly turning his head and speaking with his mouth full.

"Fore medical distributing station. I've done a meat-course at Smithfield market . . . slaughter-houses before breakfast, don't you know? I thought I could stick a good deal——" The Paymaster opened his eyes suddenly. "I tell you, it was what the sailor calls bloody . . . just bloody."

"How is young Morton?" asked the First Lieutenant.

No one appeared to know, for the enquiry went unanswered. The tall figure pacing restlessly to and fro stopped and eyed the First Lieutenant.

"Tweedledee's killed," he said dully. "Dead . . ." He resumed his thoughtful walk and a moment later repeated the last word in a low voice, reflectively. "Dead . . ."

"I know," said the First Lieutenant.

Tweedledum halted again. "I wouldn't care if we had absolutely wiped them off the face of the earth—sunk every one of them, I mean. We ought to have, with just such a very little luck. . . . And now they've slipped through our fingers, in the night."

Tweedledum extended a thin, nervous hand, opening and clenching the fingers. "Like slimy eels."

"Some did," said the India-rubber Man musingly, filling a pipe. "Some didn't. I only saw our guns actually sink one German Battleship; but the visibility was awful, and we weren't the only pebble on the beach; our line was miles long, remember."

"I saw one of their Battle-cruisers on fire and sinking," said Gerrard. "I was in the top. And all night long our Destroyers were attacking them. Two big ships blew up during the night." He cut a hunk of bread and spread it thickly with marmalade. "We must have knocked seven-bells out of 'em. And we didn't lose a single Battleship."

"Must have lost a Battle-cruiser or two, though," said the Engineer Lieutenant, sitting with his head between his hands and his forefingers propping open his eyelids. "Damn it, they fought the whole German Fleet single-handed till we arrived! Must have . . ." His voice trailed off and his fingers released his eye-lids which closed instantly. His chin dropped on to his chest, and he slept.

"Any other officer scuppered besides Tweedledee?" asked the Major of Marines. "What's up with your head, Number One?"

"Only scratched by a splinter. A nearish thing. I haven't heard of anybody else. We really got off very lightly considering they found our range." The First Lieutenant clumped off towards the door. "Now

I must go and see about clearing up the mess. I reckon it's all over bar the shouting."

As he went out Thorogood entered the Ward-room. "Would anyone like a nice beef lozenge?" he enquired, removing a packet from his pocket. "Owner having no further use for same."

"Where are we going?" asked the Paymaster. "I should like to go home, I think, if it could be arranged conveniently, James?"

"Not to-day," was the reply. "We're looking for the lame ducks on the scene of yesterday's action. It's very rough and blowing like blue blazes, so I don't suppose there are many lame ducks left afloat—poor devils. . . . With any luck we ought to get in to-morrow morning, though."

The sleeping figure with the outstretched arms suddenly raised his head and blinked at Thorogood. "Where's the elusive Hun?" he demanded.

"'Opped it," was the reply. "Otherwise vamoosed——"

"Singing 'I'm afraid to go home in the dark,'" interposed the India-rubber Man dryly. He got down off the table and stretched his arms. "Well, I shan't be sorry to get some sleep."

"Sleep!" echoed Thorogood. "You ought to see the stokers' mess-deck. The watch-off have just come up from below after sixteen hours in the stokeholds. They're lying sprawling all over the deck like a lot of black corpses—just all in."

Tweedledum sat down on the corner of the table vacated by the India-rubber Man.

"I wish I knew exactly how many of them we did sink before the Commander-in-Chief called off the Destroyers this morning," he said plaintively.

"So would a lot of people," replied Thorogood. "We're three hundred miles from home, and there's every reason to suppose there are one or two submarines and mines on the way. Those of us who get back will probably find out all we want to know in time. I shouldn't worry, Tweedledum. In fact, I don't see why you shouldn't get a bit of sleep while you can."

"By jove!" said Gerrard as a sudden thought struck him. "I wonder if they know all about it at home yet. Won't our people be bucked!"

"And the papers," added the Captain of Marines. "Can't you hear the paper-boys yelling, 'Speshul Edition! Great Naval Victory!' My word, I'd like to be in town when the news comes out." He considered the mental picture his imagination had conjured up. "I think I should get tight [illegible]!" he said.

* * * * *

The village street had a curiously deserted air when Betty walked up it on her way to the post office. The mail train had passed through about an hour before, and as a rule about this time the tenants of the rooms and cottages on the hill-side

made their way to the post office at the corner to collect their letters and chat in twos and threes round the windows of the little shops.

In the distance Betty saw a little group gathered in front of the boards that displayed the contents bill of the morning paper before the windows of the village stationer's. Recognising Eileen Cavendish, Betty quickened her pace, but as she drew near the group dispersed and Mrs. Cavendish entered the shop. Betty stopped for an instant as the flaring letters on the poster became visible, stared, took a couple of paces and stopped again opposite the boards; then she gave a little gasp, and with a thumping heart entered the low doorway of the little shop. The next moment she collided with Eileen Cavendish who was blundering out, holding an open newspaper in front of her. Her face was white under the shadow of her broad-brimmed hat, and her blue eyes like those of a terrified child.

"Have you heard?" she said, and thrust the sheet under Betty's eyes. "There's been a big action. . . . Our losses are published, but no details."

"Names?" cried Betty. "Oh, let me see . . . !"

"Only the ships that have gone down. Our husbands' ships aren't mentioned."

"Wait while I get a paper," said Betty. "I shan't be a second. What are you going to do?"

The other considered a moment. "I shall go and see Mrs. Gascoigne," she replied. "Will you come too? She may have heard something."

Betty bought her paper and rejoined Eileen Cavendish in the street.

"Poor Mrs. Thatcher . . ." she said. "Did you see? Her husband's Destroyer——"

"I know. And there are others, too. There must be five or six wives up here whose ships have gone—— Oh, it's too dreadful . . ." She was silent a moment while her merciless imagination ran riot. "I couldn't bear it!" she said piteously. "I couldn't bear it! I didn't whine when Barbara was taken. I thought I might have another baby. . . . But I couldn't have another Bill."

"Hush," said Betty, as if soothing a child. "We don't know yet. We musn't take the worst for granted till we know. I expect we should have heard by now if—if——" She couldn't finish the sentence.

They reached the door of Mrs. Gascoigne's lodgings and the landlady opened the door. Her round, good-natured face wore an air of concern.

"She's just awa' to Mrs. Thatcher, west yonder. Will ye no' step inside and bide a wee? She'll no' be long, a'm thinkin'."

She preceded them into the low-ceilinged parlour, with the horsehair-covered sofa and the Family Bible on the little table in the window, that had been a haven to so many faint-hearted ones during the past two years.

"Ye'll have heard the news?" she asked. "There's been an action. Mrs. Thatcher's man's gone down, and Mrs. Gascoigne, she's awa' to bring her a bit

comfort like." She surveyed the visitors sympathetically. "A've nae doot there's mair than Mrs. Thatcher'll be needin' comfort the morn, puir lambs."

"Oh," cried Mrs. Cavendish, "don't—don't! Please don't——" She regained her self-control with an effort and turned to the window with her lip between her teeth.

"Will I bring ye a cup of tea?" queried the landlady. "I have a kettle boilin'."

"No thank you," said Betty. "It's very kind of you, but I think we'll just sit down and wait quietly, if we may, till Mrs. Gascoigne comes in. I don't expect she'll be long."

The landlady departed a little reluctantly, and Eileen Cavendish turned from the window.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm a coward to go to pieces like this. You're a dear. . . . And it's every bit as bad for you as it is for me, I know. But I'm not a coward really. Bill would just hate me to be a coward. It's only because—because . . ." She met Betty's eyes, and for the first time the shadow of a smile hovered about her mouth.

Betty stepped forward impulsively and kissed her. "Then you're all right—whatever happens. You won't be quite alone," she said. They sat down side by side on the horsehair-covered sofa and Eileen Cavendish half-shyly rested her hand on Betty's as it lay in her lap.

"I'm a poor creature," said the elder girl. "I wish I had something—something in me that other

women have. You have it, Mrs. Gascoigne has it, and Etta Clavering. It's a sort of—strength. Something inside you all that nothing can shake or make waver." Tears welled up in her eyes and trickled slowly down her cheeks. "It's Faith," she said, and her voice trembled. "It's just believing that God *can't* hurt you . . . ." She fumbled blindly for her tiny handkerchief.

Betty's eyes were wet too. "Ah!" she said gently. "But you believe that too—really: deep down inside. Everybody does. It's in everything—God's mercy. . . . ." Her voice was scarcely raised above a whisper.

"I know—I know," said the other. "But I've never thought about it. I'm hard, in some ways. Things seemed to happen much the same whether I held my thumbs or whether I prayed. And now that I'm terrified—now that everything in life just seems to tremble on a thread—how *can* I start crying out that I believe, I believe . . . !" Her voice broke at last, and she turned sideways and buried her face in her hands.

"But you *do*," said Betty with gentle insistence.

The door opened and Mrs. Gascoigne entered. There was moisture in her fine grey eyes. "I'm so glad you two have come to keep me company," she said. She walked to the mirror over the fireplace and turned her back on her visitors for a moment while she appeared to adjust her hat. "I've been helping poor little Mrs. Thatcher to pack. She has had

a telegram, poor child, and she's off South by the afternoon train."

She turned round, still manipulating hatpins with raised hands, and in answer to the unspoken question in her guests' faces, nodded sadly. "Yes," she said. "But they've got his body. She's going to Newcastle."

"Have you had any news yourself?" asked Betty. "We have heard nothing."

"No," replied their hostess. "Nothing, except that the hospital ships went out last night. I expect the Destroyers got back some time before the big ships, and we shall hear later in the day. Rob will telegraph to me directly he gets into harbour, I know."

She spoke with calm conviction, as if wars and rumours of wars held no terrors for her. "And now," she said, smiling to them both, "let's be charwomen and drink tea in the middle of the forenoon!" She moved to the door and opened it, and as she did so a knock sounded along the tiny passage from the door that opened into the street.

Eileen Cavendish was busy in front of the glass, and half turned, holding a diminutive powder-box in one hand and a scrap of swansdown in the other.

"Yes," they heard the voice of Mrs. Gascoigne saying in the passage, "I'm here—is that for me?" There was the sound of paper tearing and a little silence. Then they heard her voice again. "Have you any others in your wallet—is there one for Mrs. Standish or Mrs. Cavendish? They're both here."

"I hae ane for Mistress Cavendish," replied a boy's clear treble. "An' there was ane for Mistress Standish a while syne; it's biding at her hoose."

Betty jumped to her feet. "What's that?" she cried. "A telegram?" Mrs. Gascoigne entered the room holding an orange-coloured envelope and handed it to Eileen Cavendish. "Yours is at your lodging," she said to Betty. Her face was very pale.

With trembling fingers Mrs. Cavendish tore open the envelope. She gave a quick glance at the contents and sat down abruptly. Then, with her hands at her side, burst into peals of hysterical laughter.

"Oh," she cried, "it's all right, it's all right! Bill's safe——" and her laughter turned to tears. "And I knew it all along . . ." she sobbed.

"Oh," said Betty. "I *am* glad." She slipped her arm round Mrs. Cavendish's neck and kissed her. "And now I'm just going to rush up to my rooms to get my message." She paused on her way to the door. "Mrs. Gascoigne," she said, "did you get any news—is your husband all right?"

Mrs. Gascoigne was opening the window with her back to the room and its occupants. "He's very happy," she replied gently.

Betty ran out into the sunlit street and overtook the red-headed urchin who was returning to the post office with the demeanour of a man suddenly thrust into unaccustomed prominence in the world. Furthermore, he had found the stump of a cigarette in the gutter, and was smoking it with an air.

He grinned reassuringly at Betty as she hurried breathlessly past him. "Dinna fash yersel', Mistress," he called. "Yeer man's bonny an' weel."

Betty halted irresolutely. "How do you know?" she gasped.

"A juist keeked inside the bit envelope," came the unblushing reply.

* * * * *

The first rays of the rising sun were painting the barren hills with the purple of grape-bloom, and laying a pathway of molten gold across the waters when the Battle Squadrons returned to their bases. A few ships bore traces in blackened paintwork, shell-torn funnels and splintered upperworks, of the ordeal by battle through which they had passed; but their numbers, as they filed in past the shag-haunted cliffs and frowning headlands, were the same as when they swept out in an earlier gloaming to the making of History.

Colliers, oilers, ammunition lighters and hospital ships were waiting in readiness to replenish bunkers and shell-rooms and to evacuate the wounded. All through the day, weary, grimy men, hollow-eyed from lack of sleep, laboured with a cheerful elation that not even weariness could extinguish. Shrill whistles, the creaking of purchases, the rattle of winches and the clatter of shovels and barrows combined to fill the air with an indescribable air of bustle and the breath of victory. Even the blanched wounded ex-

changed jests between clenched teeth as they were hoisted over the side in cots.

Before the sun had set the Battle-Fleet, complete with coal, ammunition and torpedoes, was ready for action once more. Throughout the night it rested, licking its wounds in the darkness, with vigilance still unrelaxed and its might unimpaired. For the time being its task had been accomplished; but only the enemy, counting the stricken ships that laboured into the shelter of the German mine-fields, knew how thoroughly.

The succeeding dawn came sullenly, with mist and drizzle shrouding the shores and outer sea. As the day wore on a cold wind sprang up and rolled the mist restlessly to and fro across the slopes of the hills.

On a little knoll of ground overlooking a wide expanse of level turf covered with coarse grass and stunted heather stood a man with his hands clasped behind his back. In the courage, judgment and sober self-confidence of that solitary figure had rested the destiny of an Empire through one of the greatest crises in its history: even as he stood there, bareheaded, with kindly, tired eyes resting on the misty outlines of the vast Fleet under his command, responsibility such as no one man had ever known before lay upon his shoulders.

Behind him, in the sombre dignity of blue and gold, in a silent group stood the Admirals and Commodores of the Squadrons and Flotillas with their

Staff Officers; further in the rear, in a large semicircle on slightly higher ground, were gathered the Captains and officers of the Fleet.

Where the turf sloped gradually towards the sea were ranged the seamen and marines chosen to represent the Fleet: rank upon rank of motionless men standing with their caps in their hands and their eyes on the centre of the great hollow square where, hidden beneath the folds of the Flag they had served so well, lay those of their comrades who had died of wounds since the battle. A Chaplain in cassock and white surplice moved across the open space and halted in the centre, office in hand:

"I am the Resurrection and the Life . . ."

The wind that fluttered the folds of his surplice caught the words and carried them far out to sea over the heads of the living—the sea where the others lay who had fought their last fight in that grim battle of the mist. A curlew circled low down overhead, calling again and again as if striving to convey some insistent message that none would understand. From the rocky shore near-by came the low murmur of the sea, the sound that has in it all the sorrow and gladness in the world.

At length the inaudible office for the Burial of the Dead came to an end. The Chaplain closed his book and turned away; a little movement ran through the gathering of officers and men as they replaced their caps. A loud, sharp-cut order from the gaitered officer in command of the firing-party was followed

by the clatter of rifle-bolts as the firing-party loaded and swung to the "Present!"

"Fire!" The first volley rang out sharply, and the Marine buglers sent the long, sweet notes of the "Last Post" echoing among the hills. Twice more the volleys sounded, and twice more the bugles sang their heart-breaking triumphant *"Ave atque Vale!"* to the fighting dead.

In the ensuing silence the cry of the curlew again became audible, this time out of the peace of the misty hills, gently persistent. Faint and far-off was the sound, but at the last the meaning came clear and strong to all who cared to listen.

"There is no Death!" ran the message, and again and again, "There is no Death, no Death . . . no Death . . . !"

The firing-party unloaded, and the empty cartridge cases fell to the earth with a little tinkling sound.

CHAPTER XII

"Good Hunting"

OBERLEUTNANT OTTO VON SPERRGEBIET, of the Imperial German Navy, sat on the edge of a Submarine's conning-tower with a chart open on his knees, and smoked a cigarette. It was not a brand he cared about particularly, but it had been looted from the Captain's cabin of a neutral cargo steamer on the previous afternoon. A man who relies upon such methods to replenish his cigarette case cannot, of course, expect everybody's tastes to coincide with his own.

As he smoked, the German Lieutenant's eyes strayed restlessly round the circle of the horizon. They were small eyes of a pale blue, rather close together and reddened round the rims, with light eyelashes.

The Submarine lay motionless on the surface with the waves breaking over the hog-backed hull. Every now and again a few drops of spray splashed over the surface of the chart, and the Naval man wiped them off with a scrap of lace and cambric that had once been a lady's handkerchief. He had a way with women, that German Oberleutnant.

Nothing was in sight: not a tendril of smoke

showed above the arc of tumbling waves that ringed the limit of his vision; the sun was warm and pleasant, and the figure on the conning-tower crossed his legs, encased in heavy thigh boots, and gave himself over to retrospective thought.

There had been a time when Oberleutnant von Sperrgebiet possessed the rudiments of a conscience. It could never have been described as acutely sensitive, and it never developed much beyond the rudimentary stage. Nevertheless, it had existed once: and in the early days of the war it was still sufficiently active to record certain protests and objections in his mind.

The mysterious forces that were at work in Germany, industriously remoulding, brutalising and distorting the mind of Oberleutnant von Sperrgebiet, together with millions of others, had not been blind to the prejudicial effects of conscience to an evil cause. Imperial rodomontade and the inflammatory German Admiralty War Orders had deliberately rejected, one by one, the deep-seated principles of humanity and chivalry in war. It had been done gradually and systematically—scientifically, in fact, and in the majority of cases it succeeded in producing a state of atrophy of the moral sense that was altogether admirable—from a German point of view.

In the case of Oberleutnant von Sperrgebiet, however, these early qualms had a trick of recurring. They pricked his consciousness at unexpected moments, like a grass-seed in a walker's stocking. . . .

And now, as he sat swinging his legs in the warm June sunlight, a whole procession of such reflections trooped through his mind.

For instance, there arose in his intelligence an obstinate doubt as to whether the torpedoing without warning of a liner carrying women and children at the commencement of the war had been quite within the pale of legitimate Naval warfare. He had met the man who boasted such an achievement, and for a long time he carried with him the recollection of that man's eyes as they met his above a beer mug. They had drunk uproariously together, and von Sperrgebiet heard all about it first hand, and even fingered enviously the Iron Cross upon the breast of the teller of the tale. But somehow those eyes had told quite a different story: and it was that which von Sperrgebiet remembered long after the wearer of the Iron Cross had gone out into the North Sea mists and returned no more.

Then there had been the rather unpleasant business of the boat. . . .

It was in mid-winter a long way North during one of the few calm days to be expected at that period of the year. The Submarine was running on the surface when the Second-in-Command (of whom more anon) reported a boat on the starboard bow. They altered course a little and, slowing down, passed within a few yards of it. It was a ship's life-boat, half full of water; lying in the water, rolling slowly from side to side as the boat rocked in their wash,

were five dead men. A sixth sat huddled at the tiller, staring over the quarter with unseeing eyes, frozen stiff. . . .

Von Sperrgebiet caught a glimpse of the ship's name on the bows of the boat: it happened to be that of a neutral ship he had torpedoed at the beginning of the previous week during a gale.

The German Admiralty Orders of that period contained a clause to the effect that ships were not to be torpedoed without ensuring the adequate safety of the crew. Which meant that those who had not been killed by the explosion of the torpedo could be allowed to launch a boat (weather permitting) and get into it if they had time before the ship sank. . . .

Von Sperrgebiet had given orders for the boat to be sunk by gunfire, but somehow the memory of that stark figure at the helm persisted. Try as he would, he failed to banish from his mind the staring, sightless eyes and grey, famished face. . . .

Altogether it was an unpleasant business.

Other memories of this nature came and went with the smoke from his cigarette. For some reason or other he found himself wondering whether, after all, a Belgian Relief Steamer could have been considered fair game. But he did so hate the word "Belgium," and there was always the theory of a mine to account for the incident. . . . He torpedoed her by moonlight: a very creditable shot, all things considered.

Another moonlight picture presented itself. A

boat-load of terrorised Finns rising and falling on the swell alongside the Submarine, and, half a mile away, an abandoned sailing ship with every rope and spar standing out black against the moonlight. In the stern of the boat stood a mighty Norwegian with a red beard and a voice like a bull. One of his arms rested protectingly round a woman's shoulders, and he shook a knotted fist in von Sperrgebiet's face as his ship blew up and sank.

The woman seen thus in the pale moonlight was young and pretty, and the red-bearded man bellowed that she was his wife. The announcement was not an unfamiliar one to Oberleutnant von Sperrgebiet: they usually were young and pretty when he heard that hot rage in a man's voice. Oberleutnant von Sperrgebiet made himself scarce forthwith, it might be almost said, from force of habit. . . .

The glass was falling, and it was in mid-Atlantic that they left that boat. It blew a gale next day, and the Oberleutnant, who had an eye for a pretty woman, sometimes wondered if the boat was picked up.

His mind revolved for a moment round certain incidents in connection with that affair. A German sailor from the Submarine had been sent onboard to place the bombs; he returned with cigars, a ham, and a pretty silver clock. Also a box of sugar plums, half finished.

Von Sperrgebiet took the clock and the sugar plums. The cigars and the ham (the labourer being

worthy of his hire) he allowed the sailor to keep.

But even Submarine warfare against unarmed shipping has its risks. There was the ever-memorable incident of the British tug, and even now von Sperrgebiet winced at the recollection. They had sighted a sailing ship in tow of a tug at the entrance to the channel; von Sperrgebiet was proud of his mastery of the English tongue, and it was this small vanity that led him to adopt tactics which differed somewhat from his normal caution. He submerged until within a couple of hundred yards of the approaching tow and then rose to the surface, dripping, like some uncouth sea-monster. Armed with a revolver and a megaphone, and with pleasurable anticipation in his heart, the Oberleutnant emerged from the conning-tower with a view to a little preliminary banter with these detested and unarmed English before administering a *coup de grâce.* He was just in time to see a stout, ungainly man tumbling aft along the deck from the wheel-house of the tug. Raising a booted leg with surprising agility, the stout man kicked off the shackle of the tow rope, and as he did so over went the helm; the blunt-nosed tug, released from her 3,000-ton burden, came straight for him like an angry buffalo.

They were not forty yards apart when the tug turned, and quick as the German coxswain was, the Submarine failed to avoid the stunning impact of the bows. A revolver bullet crashed through the glass window of the wheel-house; von Sperrgebiet had an

instant's vision of a round face, purple with rage, above the spokes of the wheel, and then the conning-tower's automatic hatchway closed. The Submarine was in diving trim, and she submerged in the shortest time on record. They remained on the bottom four hours while the sweating mechanics repaired the damaged hydroplane gear and effected some temporary caulking round certain plates that bulged ominously.

But von Sperrgebiet's hatred of England was real enough before this incident. He had always hated the English, even in his youth when for a year he occupied an inconspicuous niche in one of the less fastidious Public Schools. He hated them for the qualities he despised and found so utterly inexplicable. He despised their lazy contempt for detail, their quixotic sense of fairness and justice in a losing game, their persistent refusal to be impressed by the seriousness of anything on earth. He despised their whole-hearted passion for sports at an age when he was beginning to be interested in less wholesome and far more complex absorptions. . . . He despised their straight, clean affections and quarrels and their tortuous sense of humour: the affectation that led them to take cold baths instead of hot ones: their shy, rather knightly mental attitude towards their sisters and one another's sisters. . . .

All these things von Sperrgebiet despised in the English. But he also hated them for something he had never even admitted to himself. Crudely put,

it was because he knew that he could never beat an Englishman. There was nothing in his spirit that could outlast the terrible, emotionless determination in the English character to win.

Von Sperrgebiet's reflections came to an end with his cigarette. He tossed the stump overboard, and raising a pair of glasses he focused them intently on the horizon to the eastward.

For the space of nearly a minute he sat thus staring. From the interior of the Submarine came the strains of a gramophone playing a German patriotic air, and with it the smell of coffee. The crew were at dinner, and a man's deep laugh floated up the shaft of the conning-tower as if coming from the bowels of the sea.

The Oberleutnant lowered the glasses abruptly. Rolling up the chart he hoisted himself on to his feet and bent over the tiny binnacle to take the bearing of a faint smudge of smoke barely visible on the horizon. This obtained, he lowered himself through the narrow hatchway and climbed down the steel rungs into the interior of the compartment.

"Close down!" he said curtly. The gramophone stopped with a click, and instantly all was bustle and activity within the narrow confines of the steel shell.

The Second-in-Command, who was lying on his bunk reading a novel, sat up and lifted his legs over the edge. He was a spectacled youth with a cropped bullet-head and what had been in infancy a hare-lip.

His beard of about ten days' maturity grew in patches about his lips and cheeks.

"A ship, Herr Kapitan?" he asked in a thin, reedy voice, and reached for a pair of long-toed, elastic-sided boots that he had kicked off, and which lay at the foot of his bunk.

His superior officer nodded and snapped out a string of gutteral orders. The sing-song voices of men at their stations amid the levers and dials repeated the words mechanically, like men talking in their sleep. With a whizzing, purring sound the motors started, and the ballast tanks filled with a succession of sucking gurgles.

Von Sperrgebiet glanced at the compass and moved to the eye-piece of the periscope. For a while there was silence, broken only by the hum of the motors.

The Second-in-Command hung about the elbow of the motionless figure at the periscope like a morbid-minded urchin on the outskirts of a crowd that gathers round a street accident, but can see nothing. His stolid face was working and moist with excitement.

"Is it an English ship, Herr Kapitan?"

The Oberleutnant made no answer, but reached out a hand to the wheel that adjusted the height of the periscope above the water and twisted it rapidly. For twenty minutes he remained thus, motionless save for the arm that controlled the periscope. Once or twice he gave a low-voiced direction to the helmsman, but his Second-in-Command he ignored completely.

That officer moved restlessly about the Submarine, glancing from dial to dial and from one gauge to another; for a few minutes he stopped to talk to the torpedo-man standing by the closed tube. Finally he returned to his Captain's elbow, moistening his marred lip with the tip of his tongue; his face wore an unhealthy pallor and glistened in the glow of the electric lights.

"Is it an English ship, Herr Kapitan?" he asked again in his high, unnatural voice.

"Yes," snapped von Sperrgebiet. "Why?"

"I have a request to make," replied the Second-in-Command. "A favour, Herr Kapitan. It concerns a promise"—he lowered his voice till it was barely audible above the noise of the machinery—"to my betrothed."

For the first time von Sperrgebiet turned his face from the rubber eye-piece and regarded the youth with a little mocking smile that showed only a sharp dog-tooth.

"Don't say you promised to introduce her to me, Ludwig!" he sneered.

"No, no," said the other hastily. "But she made me promise not to return to her unless I had sunk with my own hands a merchant ship flying the cursed English flag."

"She is easily pleased, your betrothed," retorted the Oberleutnant, and moved back from the periscope. "Your request is granted. But remember I shall demand an introduction when we return. . . . It

is a long shot. Fire when the foremast comes on, and do not show the periscope more than a few seconds at a time. I will give the orders after you have fired."

The Second-in-Command took up his position in the spot vacated by the Oberleutnant. His tongue worked ceaselessly about his lips and his hand trembled on the elevating wheel.

"There is smoke astern," he said presently. And a moment later. "The approaching ship looks like a liner, Herr Kapitan!"

"What of that?" said von Sperrgebiet gruffly.

The Second-in-Command looked back over his shoulder at his Commanding Officer: his face was livid with excitement. "It means women, Herr Kapitan," he said, "Children perhaps. . . ."

Von Sperrgebiet shrugged his shoulders. "They are English," he replied. "Swine, sow or sucking-pig—what is the difference? They learn their lessons slowly, these English. We will drive yet another nail into their wooden heads. . . . *You* will drive it, Ludwig," he added thoughtfully: and then, as an afterthought, "for the honour of the Fatherland."

"Thank you, Herr Kapitan," replied the youth, and turned again to the periscope mirror. Silence fell upon the waiting men: the minutes passed while the elevating wheel of the periscope revolved first in one direction and then in another. At last the form of the Second-in-Command stiffened.

"Fire!" he cried: his uncertain voice cracked into a falsetto note.

The stern of the Submarine dipped and righted itself again: the Oberleutnant's harsh voice rang out in a succession of orders. The Second-in-Command leaned against a stanchion and wiped his face with his handkerchief.

A minute passed and a dull concussion shook the boat from stem to stern. Von Sperrgebiet showed his dog-tooth in that terrible mirthless smile of his. "A hit, my little Ludwig!" he said.

The Second-in-Command clicked his heels together. "For the honour of the Fatherland," he said. "Gott strafe England!"

"Amen!" said Oberleutnant Otto von Sperrgebiet.

The boat had been travelling in a wide circle after the torpedo left the tube, and ten minutes later the Oberleutnant cautiously raised the periscope. The next moment he swung the wheel round again in the opposite direction.

"Another ship?" asked Ludwig.

"Yes," replied von Sperrgebiet. "One of their cursed Armed Merchant Cruisers." He bent over the chart table for a minute and gave an order to the helmsman.

"A fresh attack?" queried the Second-in-Command eagerly.

Von Sperrgebiet returned to the periscope. "When you have been at this work as long as I have," he replied, "you will find it healthier not to meddle

with Armed Merchant Cruisers. They are all eyes and they shoot straight. No, for the time being our glorious work is done, and we shall now depart from a locality that is quickly becoming unhealthy." He glanced at the depth gauge and thence to the faces of the crew who stood waiting for orders.

"The gramophone," he called out harshly. "Switch on the gramophone, you glum-faced swine. . . . Look sharp! Something lively . . . !"

* * * * *

At seven minutes past three in the afternoon, Cecily Thorogood, that very self-possessed and prettily-clad young woman, was seated in a deck-chair on the saloon-deck of a 6,000-ton liner; an American magazine was open in front of her, under cover of which she was exploring the contents of a box of chocolates with the practised eye of the expert, in quest of a particular species which contained crystallised ginger and found favour in her sight.

At nineteen minutes past three Cecily Thorogood, still self-possessed, but no longer very prettily clad, was submerged in the chilly Atlantic up to her shoulders and clinging to the life-line of an upturned jolly-boat. To the very young Fourth Officer who clung to the boat beside her with one arm and manœuvred for a position from which he could encircle Cecily's waist protectingly with the other, she announced as well as her chattering teeth would allow that she

(a) was in no immediate danger of drowning;

(b) was not in the least frightened;

(c) was perfectly capable of holding on without anybody's support as long as was necessary.

The chain of occurrences that connected situation No. 1 with situation No. 2 was short enough in point of actual time, but so crowded with unexpected and momentous happenings that it had already assumed the proportions of a confused epoch in Cecily's mind. There were gaps in the sequence of events that remained blanks in her memory. Faces, insignificant incidents, thumbnail sketches and broad, bustling panorama of activity alternated with the blank spaces. The heroic and the preposterous were indistinguishable. . . .

At the first sound of the explosion of the torpedo Cecily jumped to her feet, scattering the chocolates broadcast over the deck. The ship seemed to lift bodily out of the water and then heeled over a little to port. There were very few people on the saloon deck and there was no excitement or rushing about. The shrill call of the boatswain's mate's pipe clove the silence that followed that stupendous upheaval of sound.

A clean-shaven, middle-aged American, wearing a collar reminiscent of the late Mr. Gladstone's and a pair of pince-nez hanging from his neck on a broad black ribbon, had been walking up and down with his hands behind his back; he paused uncertainly for a moment and then began laboriously collecting the

scattered chocolates. That was the only moment when hysteria brushed Cecily with its wings. She wanted to laugh or cry—she wasn't sure which.

"It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter!" she cried with a catch in her breath. "Don't stop now—we've been torpedoed!"

The American stared at the handful he had gathered.

"Folks'll tread on 'em, I guess," he replied, and suddenly raised his head with a whimsical smile. "A man likes to do something useful at times like this—it's just our instinct," he added as if explaining something more for his own satisfaction than hers. "I'm not a seaman—I'd only get in peoples' way messing round the boats before they were ready—so I reckoned I'd pick up your candies."

There were very few women onboard, and Cecily found herself the only woman allotted to the jolly-boat. She climbed in with the assistance of the very young and distressingly susceptible Fourth Officer. For a moment she found herself reflecting that his life must be one long martyrdom of unrequited affections. The stout American followed her with a number of other passengers. The Fourth Officer gave an order and the boat began to descend towards the waves in a succession of uneven jolts. The crew were getting their oars ready, and one was hammering the plug of the boat home with the butt of an enormous jack-knife. The stout American surveyed the tumbling sea beneath them distastefully.

"When I get to Washington," he said, "I guess I'll fly round that li'll old town till some of our precious 'too-proud-to-fight' party just gnash their teeth and shriek aloud 'How can we bear it?' "

He suddenly remembered that his pneumatic life-saving waistcoat was not inflated. Seizing the piece of rubber tubing that projected from his pocket he thrust it into his mouth and proceeded to blow with distended cheeks and his serious brown eyes fixed solemnly on Cecily's face.

He was still blowing when they capsized. How the accident happened Cecily never knew: principally because she was concentrating her mind on the bottom of the boat and wondering how soon the pangs of *mal-de-mer* might be expected to encompass her. But the fact remains that one moment the boat was rising and falling dizzily on the waves and the next, with a confused shouting of orders and a crash, they were all struggling in the water.

Cecily's life-saving jacket brought her to the surface like a cork, and a couple of strokes took her to the side of the capsized boat and situation No. 2 already described. Here she was presently joined by the American, puffing and blowing like a grampus, who was placed in possession of statement (c) referred to above. He appeared either not to hear, however, or to incline to the view that it was a mere theory based upon a fallacy. . . .

The remaining late occupants of the boat attached themselves along the sides and awaited succour with

what patience they could. Then a muffled sound like an internal explosion came from within the stricken hull as a bulkhead went. The great ship lurched sickeningly above them as a wall totters to its fall. Cecily looked up and saw for a moment the figure of the Captain standing on the end of the bridge; true to his grand traditions he was staying by his ship to the last. She listed over further and began to settle rapidly. Then, and only then, the Captain climbed slowly over the rail and dived.

The stern of the ship rose slowly into the air, then swiftly slid forward with a sound like a great sob and vanished beneath the surface. One of the life-boats approached the capsized jolly-boat, and the figures that clung to her were hauled, dripping, one by one into the stern.

Then they picked up the Captain, clinging to a grating, an angry man. He scowled round at the long green slopes of the sea and shook his fist.

"The curs!" he said. "The dirty scum. . . . Women on board. . . . No warning. . . ." Anger and salt water choked him.

"They wouldn't even give me a gun because I was a passenger ship. Unarmed, carrying women, torpedoed without warning. . . . I'll spit in the face of every German I meet from here to Kingdom Come!"

A little elderly lady with a bonnet perched awry on her thin grey hair suddenly began a hymn in a high quavering soprano.

"That's right, ma'am," said the Captain approvingly, as he wrung the water out of his clothes. "There's nothing like singing to cure sea-sickness. And we shan't be here very long. He pointed to the high bows of a rapidly approaching ship. "One of our Armed Merchant Cruisers, I fancy." He waved to the other boats to close nearer.

He was no mere optimist; before a quarter of an hour had elapsed the boats were strung out in a line towing from a rope that led from the bows of the Cruiser. A hastily improvised boatswain's stool was lowered from a davit, and one by one the passengers, then the crew, and finally the officers of the torpedoed liner were swung into the air and hoisted inboard while the Armed Merchant Cruiser continued her course.

The sea-sick Cecily, swaying dizzily for the second time that day between sky and water, looked down at the tumbling boats beneath her and for a moment had a glimpse of the stout American and the Fourth Officer. They were both standing gazing up after her as she was whisked skyward. Their mouths were open, and the expression on their faces gave Cecily a feeling of being wafted out of a world she was altogether too good for.

The sensation was a momentary one, however. The davit swung inboard as she arrived at the level of the rail and deposited her, a limp bundle of damp rags—in fact what Mr. Mantalini would have described as "a demmed moist unpleasant body"—on

the upper deck of the Armed Merchant Cruiser. With the assistance of two attentive sailors Cecily rose giddily to her feet; most of her hair-pins had come out, and her hair streamed in wet ringlets over her shoulders. She raised her eyes to take in her new surroundings, and there, standing before her with his eyes and mouth three round O's, was Armitage.

Now Cecily had gone through a good deal since seven minutes past three that afternoon. But to be confronted, as she swayed, with her wet clothes clinging to her body like a sculptor's model, deathly seasick, red-nosed for aught she knew or cared, with the man who but for her firmness and mental agility would have kept on proposing to her at intervals during the past eighteen months, was a climax that overwhelmed even Cecily's self-possession.

She chose the only course left open to her, and fainted promptly. Armitage caught her in his arms, and as he did so was probably the first and last Englishman who has ever blessed a German Submarine.

She recovered consciousness in Armitage's cabin, with the elderly lady who had sung hymns in the boat in attendance; she lay wrapped in blankets in the bunk, with hot-water bottles in great profusion all round her, and felt deliciously drowsy and comfortable. But with returning consciousness some corner of discomfort obtruded itself into her mind. It grew more definite and uncomfortable. With her eyes still closed Cecily wriggled faintly and plucked at an unfamiliar garment.

Then, slowly, she opened her eyes very wide. "What have I got on?" she asked in severe tones.

"My dear," said the elderly lady, "pyjamas! There was nothing else. They belong to the officer who owns this cabin. I think the name was Armitage. And the doctor said——"

Cecily groaned. A knock sounded, and the ship's doctor entered carrying something in a medicine glass.

"Well," he asked brusquely, "how are we?"

"Better, thanks," said Cecily faintly.

"That's right. Drink this and close your eyes again."

Cecily drank obediently and fell asleep.

Twenty-four hours later the Cruiser was moving slowly up a river to her berth alongside a wharf. Cecily, clothed and in her right mind, stood aft in a deserted spot by the ensign-staff and stared at the dingy warehouses and quaysides ashore as they slid past.

Armitage came across the deck towards her. Cecily saw him coming and took a long breath. Then, woman-like, she spoke first:

"I haven't had an opportunity to thank you yet," she said prettily, "for giving up your cabin to me—and—and all your kindness."

Armitage stood squarely in front of her, a big, kindly man who was going to be badly hurt and more than half expected it.

"There is a curious fatality about all this," he

said. "It was no kindness of either yours or mine." He glanced over her head at the rapidly approaching wharf ahead and then at her face.

"For eighteen months," he said, speaking rather quickly, "I've been like the prophet Jonah—looking for a sign. I looked to you for it, Miss Cecily," he said, "and I can't truthfully say it showed itself in a single word or look or gesture." He took a deep breath. "I'm not going to let you tell me I'm labouring under any misapprehensions. But this"—he made a little comprehensive gesture—"this is too much like the hand of Fate to disregard. Miss Cecily," he said, "little Miss Cecily, you've just twisted your fingers round my heart and I can't loose them."

"Please," said Cecily, "ah, no, please don't. . . ." Some irresponsible imp in her intelligence made her want to tell him that it wasn't Jonah who looked for a sign.

"Listen," said Armitage. He was literally holding her before him by the sheer strength of his kindly, compelling personality. "When this racket started—this war—I told them at the Admiralty my age was forty-five. It was a lie—I am fifty-two. I've knocked about the world; I know men and cities and the places where there are neither. But I've lived clean all my life and I was never gladder of it than I am at this moment. . . ."

Cecily had a conviction that unless she could stop him she would have to start crying very soon. But

there were no words somehow that seemed adequate to the situation.

"I know, dear," he went on in his grave quiet voice, "that at your age money, and all the things it buys, seem just empty folly. But, believe me, there comes a time when being rich counts a lot towards happiness. I'm not trying to dazzle you, but you know all mine is yours—you shall live in Park Lane if you care to—or I'll turn all wide Scotland into a deer forest for you to play in. . . ."

He paused. "But there is one thing, of course, that might make all this sound vulgar and sordid." He considered her with his clear blue eyes. "Are you in love with anyone else?" he asked.

Cecily clutched recklessly at the alternative to absurd tears.

"Yes," she said.

Armitage stood quite still for a moment. His calm, direct gaze never left her face, and after a moment he squared his big shoulders with an abrupt, characteristic movement.

"Then he is the luckiest man," he said quietly, "that ever won God's most perfect gift."

He gave her a funny stiff little inclination of the head and walked away.

* * * * *

Otto von Sperrgebiet did not raise the periscope above the surface again for some hours. The Submarine, entirely submerged, drove through the water

until night. After nightfall they travelled on the surface until the first pale bars of dawn appeared in the eastern sky. Von Sperrgebiet was on the conning-tower as soon as it was light, searching the horizon with his glasses.

"It is strange," he said to his Second-in-Command. "We ought to have sighted that light vessel before now." At his bidding a sailor fetched the lead line and took a sounding. Together they examined the tallow at the bottom of the lead, and von Sperrgebiet made a prolonged scrutiny of the chart. "H'm'm!" he said. "I don't understand." Submerging again, they progressed at slow speed for some hours and he took another sounding. The sky was overcast and no sights could be taken.

This time von Sperrgebiet returned from comparing the sounding with the chart, wearing a distinctly worried expression.

The hawk-eyed seaman beside him on the bridge gave an ejaculation and pointed ahead.

"Land, Herr Kapitan!" he said.

"Fool!" replied his Captain. "Idiot! How can there be land there unless"—he glanced inside the binnacle half contemptuously—"unless the compasses are mad—or I am." He raised his glasses to stare at the horizon. "You are right," he said. "You are right. . . . It is land." He gnawed his thumbnail as was his habit when in perplexity.

The next moment the seaman pointed again. "The Hunters," he said.

Von Sperrgebiet gave one glance ahead and kicked the man down through the open hatchway of the conning-tower. He himself followed, and the hatch closed. The helmsman was standing, staring at the compass like a man in a trance.

"Herr Kapitan," he said, as von Sperrgebiet approached, "it is bewitched." Indeed, he had grounds for consternation. The compass card was spinning round like a kitten chasing its tail, first in one direction, then in another.

"Damn the compass!" said von Sperrgebiet. "Flood ballast tanks—depth thirty metres—full speed ahead!"

He thrust the helmsman aside and took the useless wheel himself.

"Ludwig," he said, "to the periscope with you and tell me what you see."

The Second-in-Command waited for no second bidding; he pressed his face against the eye-pieces. "There are small vessels approaching very swiftly from all sides," he said. And a moment later, "They are firing at the periscope. . . ."

"Down with it," said von Sperrgebiet. "We must go blind if we are to get through." His face was white and his lip curled back in a perpetual snarl like a wolf at bay. As he spoke there was a splutter and the lights went out.

The voice of the Engineer sounded through the low doorway from the engine-room. "There is something fouling our propeller, Herr Kapitan," he

shouted. "The engines are labouring at full speed, but we are scarcely making any headway. The cut-outs have fused."

Von Sperrgebiet cursed under his breath. "Stop the engines," he said. "If we can't swim we must sink." He gave the necessary orders and the boat dropped gradually through the water till she rested on the bottom.

"Now," said von Sperrgebiet. "Turn on the gramophone, one of you, if you can find it."

There was a pause while someone fumbled in the darkness, and a click. Then a metallic tune blared forth bravely from the unseen instrument.

"That's right," said von Sperrgebiet in a low voice, speaking for the last time. "*'Deutschland unter Alles!'*" His laugh was like the bark of a sick dog.

Twenty fathoms over their heads, under the grey sky, and blown upon by the strong salt wind, a large man in the uniform of a Lieutenant of the Naval Reserve was standing in the bows of an Armed Trawler; his gaze was fixed on something floating upon the surface of the water ahead; but presently he raised his eyes to the circle of Armed Trawlers around him riding lazily on the swell. In the rear of the gun in the bows of each craft stood a little group of men all staring intently at the floating object. The Lieutenant waved an arm to the nearest consort.

"They reckon they'll take it lying down," he said grimly. "Well, I don't blame 'em!" He nodded at the figure in the wheel-house.

"Full speed, skipper!" The telegraph clinked, and they moved ahead, slowly gathering weigh. Then the Reserve-man turned, facing aft.

"Let her go, George," he said, raising his voice. The trawler fussed ahead like a self-important hen that has laid an egg. There was a violent upheaval in the water astern, and a column of foam and wreckage leaped into the air with a deafening roar.

The Reserve Lieutenant pulled a knife out of his pocket, and, bending down, thoughtfully added another nick to a long row of notches in the wooden beam of the trawler's fore hatch.

CHAPTER XIII

SPELL-O!

LETTIGNE sat on the edge of his sea-chest contemplating a large fragment of a German shell which he held on his knees.

"Will someone tell me where I am going to pack this interesting relic of my blood-stained past?" he enquired of the flat at large.

The after cabin-flat had all the appearances of the interior of a homestead in imminent danger of occupation by an enemy. In front of each open chest stood a Midshipman feverishly cramming boots and garments into already bulging portmanteaux and kit-bags. The deck was littered with rejected collars, pyjamas and underwear; golf-clubs, cricket-bats and fishing-rods lay about in chaotic confusion.

"Will someone tell me where I'm going to pack anything?" replied Malison, delving into the inmost recesses of his chest. "Fancy being told to pack and get away on leave and given an hour to do it in! It isn't decent. It always takes me a week to find my gear."

"Well, you'd better buck up," interposed the Senior Midshipman. "The boat leaves in ten minutes."

"Help!" ejaculated Lettigne. "I don't care," he added. "I'm not going without my blinking trophy." He removed a pair of boots from the interior of an apoplectic-looking kit-bag and substituted the jagged piece of metal. "It weighs about half a ton, but it very nearly bagged Little Willie, and I want my people to see it." He tugged and strained at the straps. "Make 'em appreciate their little hopeful. . . . Ouf! There! I only hope this yarn about there being no porters anywhere isn't true."

Harcourt, who had reduced the contents of his suit-case in volume by the simple expedient of stamping on them, had finally succeeded in closing the lid.

"Never mind," he shouted. "What does anything matter so long's we're 'appy!" He brandished a cricket-bat and sang in his high, cracked tenor:

> "Keep the home fires burning,
> Oh, keep the home fires burning,
> Keep the home fires burning. . . ."

"I dunno how it goes on," he concluded, lapsing into speech again.

"*'Cos we're all going on leave!*" roared Matthews. "That's how it ends. That's how everything ends. Ain't it all right?" He closed his chest with a bang and sat on the top with his hands in his pockets, drumming his heels against the sides. "Snooks!" he ejaculated, "I haven't felt like this since I was a mere lad."

"What are you going to do on leave?" queried

the tall sandy-haired Midshipman popularly known as "Wonk."

"Do?" echoed Matthews. "Do?" He allowed his imagination full rein for a moment. "Well," he said, "by way of a start I shall make my soldier brother take me to dinner somewhere where there's a band and fairies in low-necked dresses with diamond ta-rarras on their heads."

"That sounds pretty dull," objected Mordaunt, affectionately burnishing the head of a cleek with a bit of emery paper. "Is that all you're going to do?"

"Not 't all. After dinner I shall smoke a cigar —a mild one, you know—and then we'll go to a 'Revoo' with more fairies. Lots of 'em," he added ruminatingly, "skipping about like young stag-beetles —you know the kind of thing——" The visionary got down off his chest, and, plucking the sides of his monkey-jacket between finger and thumb, pirouetted gracefully amid the scattered suit-cases and litter of clothes. "Comme ça!" he concluded.

"What then?" demanded Lettigne, growing interested.

"Then," continued Matthews, "then we'll go and have supper somewhere—oysters and things like that. Mushrooms, p'raps. . . ."

"With an actress, Matt?" asked a small Midshipman, known as "the White Rabbit," in half-awed, half-incredulous tones of admiration.

"P'raps," admitted the prospective man-about-town. "My brother knows tons of 'em."

Harcourt burst into shouts of delight. "Can't you see Matt?" he cried hilariously. "Having supper with a massive actress!" He slapped his thighs delightedly. "Matt swilling ginger ale and saying, 'You're 's' dev'lish fine womansh.' . . . No, don't start scrapping, Matt; I've just put on a clean collar . . . and it's got to last. . . . All right—*pax*, then."

"Well," said Matthews, when peace was restored. "What's everyone else going to do? What are you going to do, Harcourt?"

"Me and Mordy are going to attrapay the wily trout," was the reply. "He's going to spend part of the leave with me, and I'm going to spend part with him. We're going to clean out the pond at his place. Topping rag."

"And you, Wonk?"

"Cricket," was the reply. "And strawberries. Chiefly strawberries."

"What about you, Bosh?"

"I shall lie in a hammock, and tell lies about the Navy to my sisters a good deal of the time. And when I'm tired of that I shall just lie—in the hammock. Sorry, I didn't mean to be funny—— Ow! I swear it was unintentional. Matt, I swear——"

The furious jarring of an electric gong somewhere overhead drowned all other sounds.

"Boat's called away!" shouted the Senior Midshipman. "Up on deck, everyone. Knock off scrapping, Bosh and Matt, or you'll be all adrift."

There was a general scramble for bags and suit-

cases, and, burdened with their impedimenta, the Midshipmen made their way up on to the quarter-deck.

Thorogood, Officer of the Watch, was walking up and down with an expression of bored resignation to the inevitable. Forward of the after superstructure the liberty-men were falling-in in all the glory of white cap-covers and brand-new suits, carrying little bundles in their hands. There was on each man's countenance that curious blend of solemnity and ecstatic anticipation only to be read in the face of a bluejacket or marine about to start on long leave.

A group of officers gathering near the after gangway stood waiting for the boat and exchanging chaff customary to such an occasion.

"Here come the Snotties," said the Staff Surgeon. "Lord, I wish I had a gramophone to record their conversation outside my cabin while they were packing." He raised his voice. "Now, then, James, what about this boat? We shall miss the train if you keep us all hanging about here much longer. Some of us have got appointments in town we don't want to miss—haven't we, Matthews?"

The Midshipman thus suddenly addressed flushed and was instantly the target for his companions' humour. "That's right, sir," confirmed Lettigne maliciously. "Matthews is taking a real live actress out to supper to-morrow night."

"Smoking a mild cigar," added another.

"And eating oysters and mushrooms," chimed in a third.

Thorogood walked towards the group of laughing, chaffing boys and men.

"She won't be long, now," he said. "You'll all catch the train; I can promise you that." He smiled wanly.

"James," said the India-rubber Man, "don't look so miserable! I know how sorry you are for us all. But we're going through with it, old man, like Britons."

"That's right," agreed the Paymaster. "We shall think of you, James, and the Commander, and the P.M.O., and all our happy messmates who are staying onboard for the refit. It makes going on leave easier to bear when we think of your smiling faces."

Thorogood turned away. "You're funny little fellows, aren't you?" he said dourly.

The Young Doctor caught the ball and sent it rolling on.

"We shall think of the pneumatic riveter at work over your heads; we shall think of the blithe chatter of the dockyard maties all over the ship, and the smell of the stuff they stick the corticene down with . . . and we shall face the sad days ahead of us with renewed courage, James, old man."

"Thank you all," replied Thorogood gravely. "Thank you for your beautiful words. Give my love to Mouldy if any of you see him"—the speaker glanced over the side. "And now I have much

pleasure in informing you that the boat is alongside, and the sooner you all get into it the sooner to sleep, as the song says."

The Midshipmen were already scrambling down the ladder, carrying their bags and coats, and the Wardroom Officers followed. Farewells and parting shafts of humour floated up from the sternsheets; Thorogood stood at the top of the gangway and waved adieu with his telescope as the boat shoved off and circled round the stern towards the landing-place. For a moment he stood looking after the smiling faces and waving caps and then turned inboard with a sigh.

"Liberty men present, sir!" The Master-at-Arms and Sergeant-Major made their reports and Thorogood moved forward, passing briskly down the lanes of motionless figures and shiny, cheerful countenances.

"Carry on," he said, and acknowledged the salute of the Chief of Police and the Sergeant of Marines.

The men filed over the side and took their places in the boats waiting alongside, and as they sheered off from the ship in tow of the launch and followed in the wake of the distant picket-boat, the closely packed men suddenly broke into a tempest of cheering.

The Captain was walking up and down the quarterdeck talking to the Commander. He smiled as the tumult of sound floated across the water.

"I wonder they managed to bottle it up as long

as they have," he said. "Bless 'em! They've earned their drop of leave if ever men did." They took a few turns in silence. "I hope to get away to-night," continued the Captain, "if they put us in dock this afternoon. When are you going for your leave, Hornby?"

The Commander ran his eye over the superstructure and rigging of the foremast. "Oh, I don't know, sir," he said. "I hadn't thought about it much. . . . I think I'll get that new purchase for the fore-derrick rove to-morrow. . . ."

* * * * *

The colour had gone out of the sunset, and in the pale green sky at the head of the valley a single star appeared.

With the approach of dusk the noises of the river multiplied; a score of liquid voices seemed to blend into the sleepy murmur of sounds that babbled drowsily among the rocks and boulders, and was swallowed beneath the overhanging branches of the trees.

The India-rubber Man moved quietly down stream, scarcely distinguishable from the gathering shadows by the riverside; he carried a light fly-rod, and once or twice he stopped, puffing the briar pipe between his teeth, to stare intently at the olive-hued water eddying past.

"Coo-ee!"

A faint call floated up the valley, clear and musical above the voices of the stream. The India-

rubber Man raised his head abruptly and a little smile flitted across his face. Then he raised his hand to his mouth and sent the answer ringing down-stream:

"Coo-oo-ee-e!"

He stood motionless in an attitude of listening and the hail was repeated.

"Sunset and evening star,"

he quoted in an undertone,

"And one clear call for me. . . ."

There had been a period in his life some years earlier when the India-rubber Man discovered poetry. For months he read greedily and indiscriminately, and then, abruptly as it came, the fit passed; but tags of favourite lines remained in his memory, and the rhythm of running water invariably set them drumming in his ears.

He turned his back on the whispering river and, scrambling up the bank, made his way down-stream through the myriad scents and signs of another summer evening returning to its peace. The path wound through a plantation of young firs which grew fewer as he advanced, and presently gave glimpses beyond the tree-trunks of a wide stretch of open turf. The river, meeting a high wall of rock, swung round noiselessly almost at right angles to its former course; in the centre of the ground thus enclosed stood a

weather-beaten tent, and close by lay a small two-wheeled cart with its shafts in the air.

The India-rubber Man paused for a moment on the fringe of the plantation and stood taking in the quiet scene. The shadowy outline of a grazing donkey moved slowly across the turf which narrowed to a single spit of sand, and here, standing upright with her hands at her sides, was the motionless figure of a girl, staring up the river. Something in her attitude stirred a poignant little memory in the mind of the India-rubber Man. In spite of his nearness he still remained invisible to her against the background of the darkling wood.

"Betty!" he called.

For an instant she stared and then came towards him, moving swiftly with her lithe, ineffable grace.

"Oh," she cried, "there you are!" She slid her fingers into his disengaged hand and fell into step beside him. "Bunje," she said with a little laugh that was half a sigh, "I'm like an old hen with one chick—I can hardly bear you out of my sight! Have you had good hunting? What was the evening rise like?"

"It was good," replied the India-rubber Man. "But it was better still to hear you call."

They came to a tall bush where the blossoms of a wild rose glimmered in the dusk-like moths. The India-rubber Man stabbed the butt of his rod in the turf, took off his cast-entwined deer-stalker and hung it on a bramble; then he slipped the strap of his

creel over his head and emptied the contents on to the grass.

"Five," he said, counting. They knelt beside the golden trout and laid them in a row. "I could have taken more," he added, "but that's all we want for breakfast. Besides, it was too nice an evening to go on killing things. . . . Sort of peaceful. That's a nice one, though, that pounder. He fancied a coachman. . . ." The India-rubber Man straightened up and sniffed the evening air aromatic with the scent of burning wood. "And I've got a sort of feeling I could fancy something, Bet——"

Betty rose too. "It's ready," she said. "I've put the table in the hollow behind the bush. I've got a surprise for you—'will you walk into my parlour? said the spider to the fly.'"

She led the way into the hollow. A brazier of burning logs stood on the side nearest the river, with a saucepan simmering upon it. Close under the wild-rose bush was a folding table covered with a blue-and-white cloth laid in readiness for a meal, with a camp stool on either side. From an overhanging branch dangled a paper Japanese lantern, glowing in the blue dusk like a jewel.

"You're a witch, Betty," said the India-rubber Man. "Where did you get the lantern?"

"At that village we passed through yesterday. It was a surprise for you!" She made a little obeisance on the threshold of their star-lit dining-room. "Will it please my lord to be seated?" she asked prettily,

and bending down busied herself amid the ashes underneath the brazier. "There's grilled trout and stewed bunny-rabbit," she added, speaking over her shoulder.

"Good enough," said her lord. "Sit down, Bet, I'm going to do the waiting." Betty laughed. "I don't mind this sort of waiting," she replied. "It's the other kind that grew so wearisome."

They made their meal while a bat, attracted by the white cloth, flickered overhead, and the shadows closed in round them, deepening into night. When the last morsel of food had vanished the India-rubber Man turned sideways on his stool to light a pipe, and by the light of the match they stared at one another with a sudden fresh realisation of their present happiness and the fullness thereof.

"Isn't it good?" said Betty. "Isn't it worth almost anything to have this peace?" She made a little gesture, embracing the scented quiet. "And just us two . . . alone."

The India-rubber Man tossed the match on to the turf where it burned steadily in a little circle of warm light.

"Yes," he said. "Just us two . . . Hark, Betty!" He held up his finger.

For a moment they listened to the infinitestimal noises of the night, straining their ears in the stillness. The river wound past them with a faint, sibilant sound like a child chuckling in its sleep; an owl hooted somewhere in the far-off sanctuary of the

trees. Betty drew her breath with a little sigh that was no louder than the rustle of the bat's wings overhead. The match burning on the grass beside them flared suddenly and went out.

"You know," said the India-rubber Man presently, "I was thinking to-night—up there, along the river—how good it all is, this little old England of ours. I sat on a big boulder and watched a child in the distance driving some cows across a meadow to be milked. . . . There wasn't a leaf stirring, and the only sounds were the sleepy noises of the river. . . . It was all just too utterly peaceful and good." The India-rubber Man puffed his pipe in silence for a moment. "It struck me then," he went on in his slow, even tones, "that any price we can pay—any amount of sacrifice, hardship, discomfort—is nothing as long as we keep this quiet peace undisturbed. . . ." Again he lapsed into silence, as if following some deep train of thought; the sound of the donkey cropping the grass came from the other side of the bush.

"One doesn't think about it in that way—up there," he jerked his head towards the North. "You just do your job for the job's sake, as one does in peace-time. Even the fellows who die, die as if it all came in the day's work." His mind reverted to its original line of thought. "But even dying is a little thing as long as all this is undefiled." He smoked in silence for a minute.

"Death!" he continued jerkily, as if feeling for

his ideas at an unaccustomed depth. "I've seen so much of Death, Betty: in every sort of guise and disguise, and I'm not sure that he isn't only the biggest impostor, really. A bogie to frighten happiness. . . . A turnip-mask with a candle inside, stuck up just round some corner along the road of life."

"You never know which corner it is, though," said Betty. She nodded her head like a wise child. "That's why it's frightening—sometimes."

For a while longer they talked with their elbows on the table and their faces very close, exchanging those commonplace yet intimate scraps of philosophy which only two can share. Then the India-rubber Man fetched a pail of water from the river, and together they washed up.

"I met Clavering away up the river this evening," he said presently. "He said they'd come down after supper and bring the banjo," and as he spoke they heard the murmur of voices along the river bank. Two figures loomed up out of the darkness and entered the circle of light from the brazier.

"Good hunting!" said a girl's clear voice. "Garry was feeling musically inclined, and so we brought the Joe with us."

The India-rubber Man returned from the direction of the tent, carrying rugs and coats which he proceeded to spread on the ground.

"We're pushing on to-morrow," continued Clavering's deep voice. "There are some lakes in the hills we want to reach while this fine weather lasts. What

are your movements, Standish? Keep somewhere near us, so that we can have our sing-songs of an evening sometimes."

"We'll follow," replied the India-rubber Man. "Nebuchadnezzar ought to have a day's rest to-morrow, and then we'll pick up the trail. Your old caravan oughtn't to be difficult to trace. Did you do any good on the river this evening . . . ?"

They settled down among the rugs, and for a while the conversation ran on the day's doings. Then Etta Clavering drew her banjo from its case. "What shall we have?" she asked, fingering the strings: and without further pause she struck a few opening chords and began in her musical contralto:

"Under the wide and starry sky . . ."

The slow, haunting melody floated out into the night, and Betty, seated beside her husband, felt his hand close firmly over hers as it rested among the folds of the rug. The warm glow of the fire lit the faces of the quartette and the white throat of the singer.

"Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill. . . ."

The last notes died away, and before anyone could speak the banjo broke out into a gay jingle, succeeded in turn by an old familiar ballad in which they all joined. Then Clavering cleared his throat and in his deep baritone sang:

"Sing me a song of a lad that is gone
Over the hills to Skye,"

A few coon songs followed, with the four voices, contralto and baritone, tenor and soprano, blending in harmony. Then Etta Clavering drew her fingers across the strings and declared it was time for bed.

"One more," pleaded Betty. "Just one more. You two sing."

Etta Clavering turned her head and eyed her husband; her eyes glittered in the starlight and there was a gleam of white teeth as she smiled. She tentatively thrummed a few chords.

"Shall we, Garry?"

Her husband nodded. "Yes," he said, "that one." He took his pipe from his mouth. "Go ahead. . . ."

So together they sang "Friendship," that perfection of old-world romance which is beyond all art in its utter simplicity.

The banjo was restored to its case at length, and the singers rose to depart. Farewells were exchanged and plans for the future, while the four strolled together to the edge of the woods.

"Well," said Clavering, "we shall see you again the day after to-morrow, with any luck."

Etta Clavering turned towards Betty. "Isn't it nice to dare to look ahead as far as that?" she asked with a little smile. "Fancy! The day after to-morrow! Good night—good night!"

Betty and the India-rubber Man stood looking

after them until they were swallowed by the darkness. Then he placed his arm round his wife's shoulders, and together they retraced their steps across the clearing towards the tent.

* * * * *

"This is the place," said the Young Doctor. He piloted his companion aside from the throng of Regent Street traffic and turned in at a narrow doorway. Pushing open a swing door that bore on its glass panels the inscription "MEMBERS ONLY," he motioned the First Lieutenant up a flight of stairs. "You wait till you get to the top, Number One," he said, "you'll forget you're ashore."

"Thank you," said the First Lieutenant as they ascended, "but I don't know that I altogether want to forget it."

They had reached the threshold of a small anteroom hung about with war-trophies and crowded with Naval officers. The majority were standing about chatting eagerly in twos and threes, while a girl with a tray of glasses steered a devious course through the crush and took or fulfilled orders. Through an open doorway beyond they caught a glimpse of more uniformed figures, and the tobacco-laden air hummed with Navy-talk and laughter.

The Young Doctor hung his cap and stick on the end of the banisters and elbowed his way to the doorway, exchanging greetings with acquaintances.

"Come in here," he said over his shoulder to the First Lieutenant, "and let's see if there's anyone from the ship—hullo! I didn't expect to see this——" He made a gesture towards the empty fireplace. There, seated upon the club-fender, with his right hand in his trousers pocket and his expression of habitual gloom upon his countenance, sat Mouldy Jakes. His left sleeve hung empty at his side, and from the breast of a conspicuously new-looking monkey-jacket protruded a splint swathed about in bandages. A newly-healed scar showed pink across his scalp.

A laughing semi-circle sat round apparently in the enjoyment of some anecdote just concluded. A Submarine Commander of almost legendary fame stood by the fender examining something in a little morocco case. Mouldy Jakes turned a melancholy eye upon the new-comers.

"More of 'em," he said in tones of dull despair. "What d'you want—Martini or Manhattan?"

"Martini," replied the Young Doctor, advancing, "both of us; but why this reckless hospitality, Mouldy? Are you celebrating an escape from the nursing home?"

The Submarine man closed the case with a little snap and handed it back to Mouldy Jakes.

"We're just celebrating Mouldy's acquisition of that bauble," he explained. "He's been having the time of his life at Buckingham Palace all the morning."

"Not 'arf," confirmed the hero modestly. "Proper day-off, I've been having!" He raised his voice. "Two more Martinis an' another plain soda, please, Bobby."

The First Lieutenant laughed.

"Who's the soda water for—me?"

Mouldy shook his head lugubriously.

"No," he replied, "me. There was another bird there this morning being lushed up to a bar to his D.S.O.—an R.N.R Lieutenant called Gedge. What you'd call a broth of a boy. We had lunch together afterwards." The speaker sighed heavily and passed his hand across his forehead. "I think we must have had tea too," he added meditatively.

The Young Doctor looked round the laughing circle of faces. "Where is he? Did you bring him along with you?"

Mouldy Jakes shook his head and reached out for his soda water. "No . . . he went to sleep. . . ."

The Young Doctor sat down on the fender beside the speaker. "How's the hand getting on, old lad?"

"Nicely, what's left of it. They let me out without a keeper now. Had a good leave? When d'you go back?"

"To-morrow," replied the First Lieutenant with a sigh. "Buck up and get well again, Mouldy, and come back to us. We're all going North to-morrow night, Gerrard and Tweedledum, and Pills here . . .

and all the rest of 'em. You'd better join up with the party!" He spoke in gently chaffing, affectionate tones. "I don't think we can spare you, old Sunny Jim."

"No," said Mouldy Jakes dryly; "but unfortunately that's what the rotten doctors say." He rose to his feet and extended his uninjured hand, "S'long, Number One! I've got to get back to my old nursing home or I'll find myself on the mat. . . . S'long, Pills. Give 'em all my love, and tell 'em I'm coming back all right when the plumbers have finished with me." He stopped at the doorway and turned, facing the group round the fireplace.

"I guess you couldn't do without your Little Ray of Sunshine!" His wry smile flitted across his solemn countenance and the next moment he was gone.

CHAPTER XIV

Into the Way of Peace

THE King's Messenger thrust a bundle of sealed envelopes into his black leather despatch-case and closed the lock with a snap.

"Any orders?" he asked. "I go North at eleven to-night."

The civilian clerk seated at the desk in the dusty Whitehall office leaned back in his chair and passed his hand over his face. He looked tired and pallid with overwork and lack of exercise.

"Yes," he said, and searched among the papers with which the desk was littered. "There was a telephone message just now——" He found and consulted some pencilled memoranda. "You are to call at Sir William Thorogood's house at nine o'clock. There may be a letter or a message for you to take up to the Commander-in-Chief." The speaker picked up a paper-knife and examined it with the air of one who saw a paper-knife for the first time and found it on the whole disappointing. "The Sea Lords are dining there," he added after a pause.

The King's Messenger was staring through the window into the well of a dingy courtyard. He received his instructions with a rather absent nod of the head.

"The house," continued the civilian in his colourless tones, "is in Queen Anne's Gate, number——"

"I know the house," said the King's Messenger quietly. He turned and looked at the clock. "Is that all?" he asked. "If so, I'll go along there now."

"That's all," replied the other, and busied himself with his papers. "Good night."

Despatch-case in hand, d'Auvergne, the King's Messenger, emerged from the Admiralty by one of the small doors opening on to the Mall. He paused on the step for a moment, meditating. The policeman on duty touched his helmet.

"Taxi, sir?"

"No, thanks," replied d'Auvergne. "I think I'll walk; I've not far to go."

Dusk was settling down over the city as he turned off into St. James's Park, but the afterglow of the sunset still lingered above the Palace and in the soft half-light the trees and lawns held to their vivid green. A few early lamps shone with steady brilliance beyond the foliage.

On one of the benches sat a khaki-clad soldier and a girl, hand-in-hand; they stared before them unsmiling, in ineffable speechless contentment. The King's Messenger glanced at the pair as he limped past, and for an instant the girl's eyes met his disinterestedly; they were large round eyes of china blue, limpid with happiness.

The passer-by smiled a trifle grimly. "Bless

'em!" he said to himself in an undertone. "They don't care if it snows ink. . . . And all the world's their garden. . . ."

Podgie d'Auvergne had fallen into a habit of talking aloud to himself. It is a peculiarity of men given to introspective thought who spend much time alone. Since the wound early in the war that cost him the loss of a foot he had found himself very much alone, though the rôle of "Cat that walked by Itself" was of his own choosing. It is perhaps the inevitable working of the fighting male's instinct, once maimed irrevocably, to walk thenceforward a little apart from his fellows—that gay company of two-eyed, two-legged, two-armed favourites of Fate for whom the world was made.

For a while he pursued the train of thought started by the lovers on the bench. The distant noises of the huge city filled his ears with a murmur like a far-off sea, and abruptly, all unbidden, Hope the Inextinguishable flamed up within him. Winged fancy soared and flitted above the conflagration.

"But supposing," said Podgie d'Auvergne to the pebbles underfoot, returning to his hurt like a sow to her wallow, "supposing I was sitting there with her on that seat and some fellow came along and insulted her!" He considered unhinging possibilities with a brow of thunder. "Damn it!" said the King's Messenger, "I couldn't even thrash the blighter."

He made a fierce pass in the air with his walking-

stick, dispelling imaginary Apaches, and brought himself under the observation of a policeman in Birdcage Walk.

"Any way, I'm not likely to find myself sitting on a bench with her in St. James's Park, or anywhere else," concluded the soliloquist. High Fancy, with scorched wings, fluttered down to mundane levels.

He turned into Queen Anne's Gate, but on the steps leading up to the once familiar door he paused and looked up at the front of the old house.

"That's her window," said the King's Messenger, and added sternly, "but I'm here on duty, and even if she——" He rang the bell and stood listening to the preposterous thumping of his heart.

The door opened while he was framing an imaginary sentence that had nothing to do with the duty in hand.

"Hullo, Haines!" he said. "Where's Sir William?"

The old butler peered at the visitor irresolutely for an instant.

"Why," he said, "Mr. d'Auvergne, sir, you're a stranger! For a moment I didn't recognise you standing out on the doorstep——"

The visitor crossed the threshold and was relieved of cap and stick.

"Sir William said an officer from the Admiralty would call at nine, sir; but he didn't mention no name, and I was to show you into the library. Sir

William is still up in the laboratory, sir"—the butler lowered his voice to a confidential undertone—"with all the Naval gentlemen that was dining here—their Lordships, sir." He turned as he spoke and led the way across the hall. "It's a long time since you was last here, sir, if I may say so——" There was the faintest tone of reproach in the old servitor's tones. "I dare say you'll be forgetting your way about the house." The butler stopped at a door. "This way, sir—Miss Cecily's in here——"

The King's Messenger halted abruptly, as panic-stricken a young gentleman as ever wore the King's uniform.

"Haine's!" he said. "No! Not—not that room. I'll wait—I——" But the old man had opened the door and stood aside to allow the visitor to enter.

D'Auvergne drew a deep breath and stepped forward. As he did so, the butler spoke again.

"Lieutenant d'Auvergne, Miss," he said, and quietly closed the door.

Save for the light from a shaded electric reading-lamp by the fireplace the big room was in shadow. A handful of peat smouldered on the wide brick hearth and mingled its faint aroma with the scent of roses.

An instant's silence was followed by the rustle of silk, and a white-clad form rose from a low arm-chair beside the reading-lamp.

"I seem to remember the name," said Cecily in her clear, sweet tones, "but you're in the shadow.

Can you find the switch . . . by the door. . . .'' An odd, breathless note had caught up in her voice.

The King's Messenger laid the black despatch bag he still carried on a chair by the door and limped towards her across the carpet.

"I don't think the light would help matters much," he said quietly. "I'm generally grateful for the dark."

"Ah, Tony . . . ." said the girl, as if he had countered with a weapon that somehow wasn't quite fair. "Come and sit down. We'll leave the lights for a bit, and then we needn't draw the curtains: it's such a perfect evening." She spoke quite naturally now, standing by the side of the wide fireplace with one hand resting on the mantel. The soft evening air strayed in at the open windows, and the little pile of aromatic embers on the hearth glowed suddenly.

The King's Messenger sat down on the arm of the vacant chair, and looked up at her as she stood in all her fair loveliness against the dark panelling. He opened his lips as if to speak, and then apparently thought better of it. The girl met his gaze a little curiously, as if waiting for some explanation; none apparently being forthcoming she shouldered the responsibility for the conversation.

"I'm all alone," she explained, "because Uncle Bill is up in the laboratory. The air's full of mystery, too; there are five Admirals up there, and one's a perfect dear. . . ." Cecily paused for breath. "His

eyes go all crinkley when he smiles," she continued.

"Lots of people's do," conceded the visitor.

Cecily shot him a swift glance and looked away again.

"He smiled a good deal," she continued musingly. "And Uncle Bill's awfully thrilled about something. He was up all night fussing in the laboratory, and when he came down to breakfast this morning he hit his egg on the head as if it had been a German and said, '*Got* it!' "

The King's Messenger nodded sapiently, as if these unusual occurrences held no mystery for him. Silence fell upon the room again: from a clock tower in Westminster came the clear notes of a bell striking the hour. The sound seemed to remind the visitor of something.

"I was told to come here," he announced suddenly, as if answering a question that the silence held.

The white-clad figure stiffened.

"*Told to!*" echoed Cecily. "May I ask——"

"They told me at the Admiralty," explained Simple Simon, the King's Messenger, "I was to call for despatches."

"Oh . . ." said Cecily, nodding her fair head, "I *see*. I confess I was a little puzzled . . . but that explains . . . and it was War-time, and you couldn't very well refuse, could you?" She surveyed him mercilessly. "They shoot people who refuse to obey orders in War-time, don't they—how-

ever distasteful or unpleasant the orders may be? You just had to come, in fact, or be shot . . . was that it?"

The victim winced.

"You don't understand," he began miserably. "There's a very important——"

Cecily interrupted with a little laugh.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! Tony, if you're going to begin to talk about important matters"—the white hands made a little gesture in the gloom—"why, of course, I couldn't understand. And I'm quite sure they wouldn't ask you to do anything that wasn't really important. . . . Oh, Tony, you must have had a lot of *terribly* important things to do during the last two years: so many that you haven't had time to look up your old friends, or—or answer their silly letters even . . . at least," added Cecily, "so I've heard from people who—knew you well once upon a time."

The King's Messenger rose to his feet and began to walk slowly to and fro with his hands behind his back. Cecily watched the halting step of the man who three years before had been the hero of the Naval Rugby-football world, and found his outline grow suddenly misty.

"Listen," he said quietly. "I've got to tell you something. It's something I'd have rather not had to talk about. . . . And I don't know whether you'll altogether understand, because you're a woman, and women——"

"I know," said Cecily quickly. "They're just a pack of silly geese, aren't they, Tony? They've no intuition or sympathy or power of understanding. . . . They only want to be left in peace and not bothered or have their feelings harrowed. . . . They're incapable of sharing another's disappointment or sorrow, or of easing a burden or—or anything. . . ."

The speaker broke off and crossed swiftly to the vacated chair. For a moment she searched for something among the cushions and, having found it, stepped to the window and stood with her back to the visitor, apparently contemplating the blue dusk deepening into night.

The King's Messenger stopped and stared at her graceful form outlined against the window. Then he took one step towards her and halted again. Cecily continued to be absorbed in the row of lights gleaming like fireflies beyond the Park.

"Cecily," he began, and let his mind return to an earlier train of thought. "Supposing that I—that you were going for a walk with me."

"We'll suppose it," said Cecily. "I've an idea it has happened before. But we'll suppose it actually happened again."

"I walk very slowly now-a-days," added the King's Messenger.

Cecily amended the hypothesis.

"We'll suppose we were going for a slow walk," she said.

"I can't walk very far, either."

"A short, slow walk."

"And supposing," continued the theorist in sepulchral tones, with his hands still behind his back, "supposing some fellow came along and—well, and said 'Yah! Boo!' to you—or—or something like that. Cecily—would you despise me if I couldn't—er—run after him and kick him?"

Cecily turned swiftly. "Yah! Boo!" she ejaculated. *"Yah! Boo!* Oh, Tony, how thrilling! I'd say 'Pip! Pip!'"

She, too, had her hands behind her, and stood with her head a little on one side regarding him. Her face was in shadow, and he saw none of the tender mirth in her eyes. "Would you let me say 'Pip! Pip!' to a perfect stranger, Tony?—and me walking-out with you!"

"Let you!" he said with a sort of laugh like a gasp and stepped towards her.

For an instant Fear peeped out of the two windows of her soul, and she swiftly raised her hands as if to fend off the inevitable. But the King's Messenger was swifter still and had them imprisoned, crumpled in his somewhere between their galloping hearts.

"My dear," he said, "my dear, I love you!"

Her head dropped back in the shelter of his arm, and she searched his face with eyes like a Madonna on the Judgment Seat.

"I know," she said softly, and surrendered lips and soul as a child gives itself to Sleep.

Through the closed door came the muffled sound of voices in the hall. Uncle Bill was talking in tones that were, for him, unusually loud. Someone fumbling at the handle of the door appeared to be experiencing some difficulty in opening it.

Cecily, released, turned to the window like a white flash and buried her hot face among the roses. The King's Messenger remained where he stood, motionless.

Slowly the door opened, letting in the murmur of voices. Uncle Bill had his hand on the knob and stood with his shoulder turned to the interior of the room, apparently listening to something one of his guests was saying.

In the lighted hall beyond, d'Auvergne caught a glimpse of Naval uniforms and white shirt-fronts.

". . . It ought to go a little way towards confounding their knavish tricks," a man's deep voice was saying.

"Yes," said Sir William. He turned as he spoke and took in the occupants of the room with a swift, keen glance. "'And to guide our feet into the way of peace!'"

APR 7 1919

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